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# CHRISTIANCOURIER



## Conservatives edge towards centre: Harper's fluctuating political stance

Brendan Kooy

OTTAWA, Ontario – Prime Minister Harper made headlines when he stopped an Australian company, BHP Billiton, from buying out Saskatchewan's Potash Corp. in what would have been the largest corporate takeover of 2010. The move raised legitimate concern that the Conservative government is moving towards the centre of the political spectrum, unduly influenced by a similar shift in American politics this year.

Those on the far economic right of American politics today – figures like Senator Dick Armey and Sarah Palin – are reviving the cries of the original Tea Party on behalf of the economically overtaxed and oppressed. The



"Not a net benefit to Canada," Industry Minister Tony Clement says of Billiton deal.

modern Tea Party movement cries out against government bailouts, economic stimulus packages and unwarranted intervention in the free market. Despite the wildly populist

presidential campaign that saw President Barack Obama elected under a banner of change and renewal, specifically for the American economy, the initial goodwill that he enjoyed seems to be diminishing, in part because of groups like the Tea Party. As the American deficit continues to roll over into the trillions of dollars and unemployment numbers remain stubbornly high, the libertarian message of American conservatives has suddenly become more relevant and catchy. Nowhere was this more evident than in the recent primaries of November, in which the Democrats lose control of the House of Representatives – something that might have been dubbed unthinkable in 2008, during Obamamania.

Where does this leave the United States' northern neighbours? Canada, despite being ruled by a Conservative government since 2006, was largely forced to

adopt the same massive stimulus and bailout measures that the Democrats did in the United States. There were differences between the two countries, of

*Is our Prime Minister conservative enough for his own political base?*

course, namely Canada's superior and higher regulated banking system, but with both nations' economies rooted in the capitalist principles of the open market, should Canadians have expected a different economic response from Prime Minister Stephen Harper and the Conservatives?

**The shrinking spectrum**

In short, the Harper government realized that desperate times called for desperate measures. See **Centre** on page 2



## World energy demands collide with climate change efforts Part I of a series on global energy issues

Mike Wevers

EDMONTON, Alberta – You may have missed it, but earlier this month in Mexico, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change brought together nearly 200 countries and some 15,000 negotiators and activists. Even though so many came with high expectations, a consensus on achieving greenhouse gas emission reduction targets remains out of reach. Facing failure, the UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, introduced us to a new guiding principle for all consensus building: "we cannot let the perfect be the enemy of the good." The deadlock to reaching some good,

if not perfect, agreement in climate change policy is all about economic development and jobs. And in a world economy still reeling from recession, such an agreement is even less likely.

**Economy trumps environment**

The recession's most damaged economy was that of the United States, the full impact of which President Obama recently felt in November's mid-term elections. The American economy lost tens of thousands jobs, many in its industrial heartland. The U.S. will not sign on to a climate change agreement that forces it to cut



Greenpeace protesters in Mexico mimic rising sea levels around the world.

greenhouse gas emissions while allowing those developing countries, primarily China and India, are shielded from equally stringent targets to

allow those developing countries an opportunity to catch up economically. The United States, supported in this cause by Canada, contends that this will mean further losses in its manufacturing sector, as the jobs (and the greenhouse gases they emit) continue their shift to China and India, unimpeded by easier climate change targets in those countries.

Therefore the subtext to the immense challenge of achieving any sort of progress on climate change is economic development. The world talks about achieving more immediate results on climate change, but its economic behaviour sends a different message. More economic development means more energy consumption, which mean more greenhouse gas emissions. See **Global energy** on page 2



## News

**Centre** *continued from page 1*

leading it to follow suit (with nearly all of the Western world) in stimulating the private sector economy. For many in Canada, however, the economic response of the Conservatives to the events of 2008-2009, combined with a broader look at the Conservative platform since 2006, have raised the question of how conservative the Conservatives really are.

To be sure, conservative politics in Canada have a long and storied past. Although the majority of Canadian governments have been formed by the Liberal party – the self-proclaimed “natural governing party of Canada” – Canadian history is marked by Conservative leaders such as John A. MacDonald, Robert Borden, John Diefenbaker and Brian Mulroney. Stephen Harper’s name might very well be added to that list someday, but is he actually conservative enough for his own political base?

On social issues, the Harper government continues to push forward a very right-wing agenda. Issues like (opposition to) the long gun registry and the Tories’ seemingly most important platform, the “Tough on Crime” initiative, have received much of their legislative attention. Aside from failing to take on the issues of legalized abortion and gay marriage – issues which would be unacceptable for the Republicans in the U.S. to ignore – the Conservatives have remained socially true to form.

Economically, it has been a vastly different story. Aside from moves to increase free trade alliances with countries around the world and omitting the “desperate times” response to the 2008-2009 global financial collapse, Harper’s Conservatives have not exactly walked a straight economic line. The decision to block the foreign takeover of the Potash



*Harper celebrates with recently elected Conservative MP Julian Fantino.*

Corp. flies in the face of free market capitalism, as do the government’s flirtations with federal financial support for a new NHL-ready hockey arena in Quebec City and the astronomical spending on the G8 and G20 Summits this past summer.

Canada’s federal debt is larger than it has ever been. Federal spending rates since 2006 have never been higher. The size of the federal government has not shrunk. Doesn’t paint a very conservative picture, does it?

**Setting precedents**

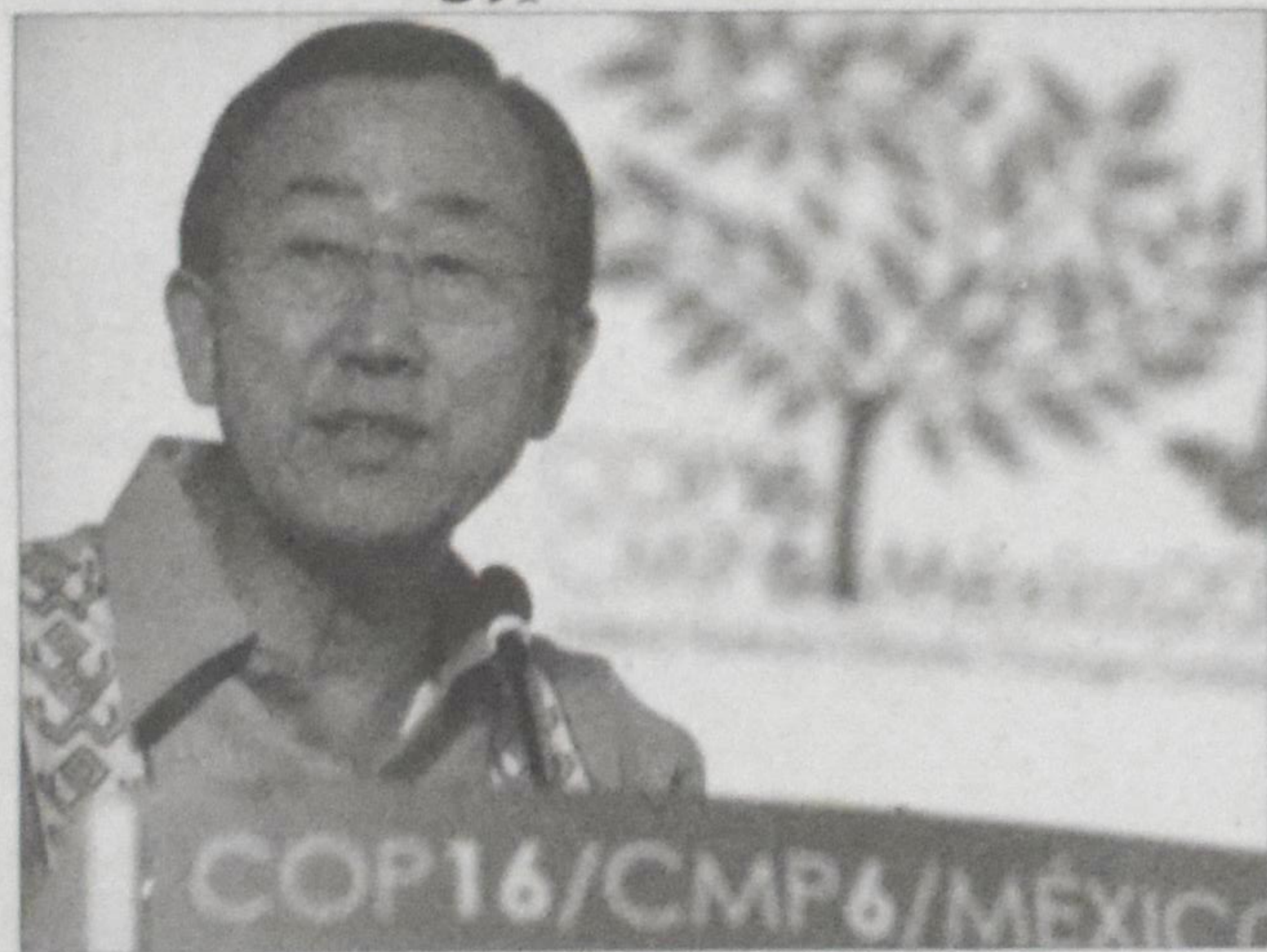
For a governing party that one would expect to be preaching the gospel of the free market and small government, politics seem to have gotten in the way. In Prime Minister Harper’s defence, governing with a minority rule can be difficult. Despite enjoying the weaknesses of

two Liberal leaders, Stéphane Dion and Michael Ignatieff, Harper has been forced to remain very close to the centre of the political spectrum, and even times venture to the left. While the Conservatives enjoy a huge majority of support in the West, coupled with decent strength in the East, the ability to win the populist provinces of Ontario and Quebec have forced a compromise of their economic agenda.

Even aside from the outward political gridlock with the Liberals and others, the Conservatives might soon face challenges from inside their own party as well. Outspoken leaders like Maxine Bernier have not been shy about the desire to move the Tories in a more economically conservative and libertarian direction. MPs such as Bernier might not be so bold if they were in the Prime Minister’s seat, but the message resonates nonetheless. Coupled with the departure of stalwarts like Jim Prentice and possible future departures of other high-profile Tory cabinet ministers, this could leave a serious void of leadership and character in the current government.

Balancing the internal party interests, the national populist interests, and holding the line on small “c” conservatism won’t be easy, for Prime Minister Harper or any other leader who ascends the Conservative Party ranks. If a majority government is secured during Harper’s time at the helm, his legacy will undoubtedly be cemented. If not, his years in office could very well just fade away in the minds of future Canadians.

*Brendan Kooy holds a degree in political science and history, and is a graduate of the Laurentian Leadership Centre. He currently resides and works in Chatham, Ontario.*

**Global energy** *continued from page 1*

Ban Ki-moon is concerned that negotiations haven’t resulted in action, not less. Before we point too many fingers East, however, we should remember that aggregate energy consumption is just the total of all our individual behaviours: us, in other words, tanking up our vehicles (transportation accounts for nearly 60 percent of world oil demand) and turning up our furnaces. North America still leads the way in per capita use, but the rest of the world’s population is trying to catch up quickly, making the thirst for more energy sources seem unquenchable.

The world’s natural gas supply has strengthened. Dependency on conventional natural gas sources has been supplanted by the new-found abundance of gas which producers literally rip out of underground coal and shale seams. As a result, natural gas prices are at historic lows, giving consumers no encouragement to reduce consumption and greenhouse gas emissions.

**The challenge of ‘peak oil’**

Not so with oil. We know that providence supplied this energy resource graciously, but not in an unending amount; it is indeed a non-renewable resource. Some

analysts have annual world oil production peaking early in this half of the 21st century. If you are building an oil-dependent manufacturing plant with a 25-year life, future oil availability will have a considerable effect on project financing. If we are close to “peak oil,” and if the world economy remains as dependent on oil as it is now, oil’s cost will be driven up well over \$100 a barrel. Whenever an unquenchable thirst meets an increasingly limited supply, the price to get some of that supply will go up significantly.

**Oil sands get mixed message**

This is nothing but good news for the ongoing development of the oil sands in Alberta. 2010 has seen significant international interest in the province’s resource, as many countries try to secure long term oil supply. Most recently, on November 22, Thailand’s largest national oil company announced it had bought a 40 percent stake in a major oil sands project in Alberta, that country’s first foray into the North American market.

On November 1, Prime Minister Singh of India predicted that his country’s oil needs would rise by 40 percent over the next 10 years, well below its domestic supply growth of 12 percent. India already imports three-quarters of its oil requirement, so it will become all the more dependent on foreign reserves. Hence, the PM encouraged its national oil companies to go abroad and acquire new or existing sources, and there will be no surprise when this brings them to Alberta.

China has been a major player in the Alberta oil sands for some time now. In April this year, Sinopec, China’s second largest oil producer, paid \$4.65 billion for a 10 percent stake in Syncrude, Alberta’s largest oil sands company. Yes, the financing involved is huge; this is big business. The CEO of the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters association acknowledged that the \$40 billion spent last year on Alberta projects has significant spin-offs benefits throughout Canada. In fact, “the \$40 billion in private investment is larger than any publicly funded infrastructure project in the world outside of China.”



*Foreigners simultaneously criticize and invest in Canada’s oil sands.*

Notwithstanding the world’s appetite for Alberta’s oil, whatever the source, the province’s Minister of the Environment was welcomed to the UN Mexico conference with a full page advertisement critical of Alberta’s “tar sands” development. Many Albertans are confused by Alberta’s domestic and international treatment. Countries and companies line up to get a piece of its oil sands business while simultaneously criticizing the uncontrolled tar sands development. While the Environment Minister bears the brunt of this duplicity, the province’s Finance Minister welcomes the world’s investment, as do most Alberta taxpayers.

**Alternative energy sources**

How do we reconcile the apparently contradictory expectations of achieving global reductions in greenhouse gas emissions to care for God’s creation, while meeting the energy requirements of the world’s economies? Alternative energy sources, with reduced carbon footprints, should be a logical part of the outcome. Yet their current rate of development is only displacing some of the demand growth, and is far from sufficient to meet all the increase. It seems inevitable, however, that we develop these alternatives to become some of the good – if not perfect – solutions that the UN Secretary General suggests.

*Mike Wevers is an independent consultant, retired from the Alberta Government as an Assistant Deputy Minister. He lives in Edmonton. The rest of this series will examine biofuels, solar and wind energy to see how effectively these alternative energy sources reconcile climate change challenges with world energy demands.*





## News

# Hope dwindles in Haiti

*"But as a mountain erodes and crumbles and as a rock is moved from its place, as water wears away stones and torrents wash away the soil, so you destroy man's hope."*

Job 14:18-19

Heidi Kerssies

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti — In Port-au-Prince, the capital of Haiti, a pastor stands on the street and asks people to join with him in prayer. A few streets over someone is shot dead. People in the streets are protesting the recent election results. They throw rocks, burn tires, and rip down signs — actions that leave United Nations peacekeepers responding with tear gas and international aid workers cloistering themselves away.

Anger is present; hope is eroding, just as the land has been eroded. Earthquake, cholera, tent cities, tropical storms, unjust elections — these are some of the eroding factors. And these are on top of being the poorest nation in the Americas, having almost a 50 percent illiteracy rate, having a life expectancy of less than 50 years, and having almost 50 percent of the population undernourished.

Recently cholera began infecting thousands of people in Haiti. The disease has spread to every region of the country and it has killed more than 2,000 people. Cholera is an infection of the small intestine that is transferred through drinking contaminated water. It is easily preventable if sanitary conditions are properly maintained. When not treated in time, it causes people to become dehydrated and quickly lose their strength.

Non-government organizations (NGOs) are abundant in Haiti — over 10,000 are providing aid to the country. And yet chaos still seems to reign, with the cholera epidemic only one example of disorder. Even with plentiful help it is never enough. There is too much sickness, too much despair, too much pain, and too little hope.

## 'Dead aid'

Some believe that excessive NGOs are part of the problem. Edmond Mulet, director of the UN mission in Haiti recently said, "Instead of turning over responsibility to the Haitians the aid workers have created many structures that replace the government in areas like education and healthcare."

One might argue that a country which boasts 32 coups in its 200 year history, which has endured dictators such as Papa Doc and his son, and which is ranked among one of the most corrupt countries in the entire world, is in need of international aid, that perhaps the Haitians themselves are not able to find ways to overcome their obstacles. Maybe their obstacles are too great for one nation to bear. As water



A Haitian child fights cholera in a temporary Port-au-Prince clinic.

erodes a stone, as earthquakes crumble the land, as rains wash away the earth, and as water dries out the thirsty, so one's hope is slowly worn down. Hope is replaced with anger — the hand that once held the hoe now clenches a rock.

Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator, wrote over 40 years ago about oppression and how all people can be divided into two groups — oppressors and oppressed. He cautions against false generosity, of aid that keeps the oppressed still firmly oppressed. He says, "True generosity lies in striving so that these hands — whether of individuals or entire peoples — need be extended less and less in supplication, so that more and more they become human hands which work and, working, transform the world" (from *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*). Some may call it dignity.

Recently a visitor to one of the tent cities was asking a young man about where he was living. Did he think of it as his permanent home? Did he hope to live somewhere else soon? Many times the Haitian responded by saying, "We don't got no choice." Hope is being lost, as blame about the source of cholera is bantered about. NGOs seek to help, to make a difference in a broken country. Maybe the place to start is lifting up the spirit of a Haitian man or woman, to come along side and know the pain that continually erodes one's hope. One Haitian proverb states, "The rock in the water does not know the pain of the rock in the sun." (*Woch nan dio pa konnen doule woch nan soley.*)

Hope requires believing that there is a choice; that tomorrow may be a better day.



Haiti urgently needs 1,000 trained nurses and at least 100 doctors, according to the Red Cross.

May there continue to be pastors in Haiti who stand in the streets to pray among people clenching rocks in their hands. May NGOs continue to offer support and training for Haitians, to provide vision and hope for a future. May all hands, those of the oppressors and of the oppressed, work side by side in rebuilding and transforming the world. And may God have mercy on us all and give us hope.

Heidi Kerssies attends Georgetown Christian Reformed Church and teaches Grades 2 and 3 at Halton Hills Christian School.



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## WAR VETERANS OF THE FUTURE...

AND SO, THERE I WAS,  
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ADMINISTRATOR LEFT WHEN  
THE WIKILEAKS DENIAL OF  
SERVICE ATTACKS HIT.  
PRETTY SOON, I WAS  
DOWN TO A 5-YEAR-OLD  
LINUX COMPUTER AND  
A PACKAGE OF SKITTLES,  
WHICH HAD TO LAST ME  
UNTIL SUPPER.



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## Editorials

## Against the HUP



Shiao Chong

For decades, churches have bought into the homogenous unit principle (HUP) popularized by the Church Growth movement. The HUP basically suggests that the fastest and easiest way for churches to grow is to capitalize on the sociological fact that “birds of a feather flock together” by building homogenous communities, e.g. Korean churches reaching out to Koreans, Chinese churches to the Chinese, Black churches to Blacks. The HUP is still a very influential philosophy. Even innovative, forward-thinking church planters like Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch wrote in their otherwise fine book, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st Century Church*, that “we believe that the only way forward is to embrace the HUP as a mission strategy, while working toward heterogeneity with mature Christians in community. In other words, heterogeneity is a discipleship issue, not a missional one.” (p. 52)

Theologically, I disagree. I believe that God has an inter-cultural and a heterogeneous vision for the church. By inter-cultural, I mean a community where members from different cultures inter-relate and inter-depend on each other. We must remember that Jesus commissioned his mono-cultural group of Jewish disciples to “go and make disciples of all nations” (Matt.28:19), where “all nations” is shorthand for Gentiles. So, Jesus was really telling his Jewish disciples to “go and make disciples of Gentiles.” The Great Commission is originally and inherently a cross-cultural commission! I don’t know how Frost and Hirsch can separate discipleship and mission when the mission is to make disciples. And I don’t know how they can separate heterogeneity or diversity from mission when the mission is inherently cross-cultural, and, hence, inherently engaging diversity. I believe Jesus intends his church to be inter-cultural by default.

## The easy route

So often, churches are tempted to do what works rather than do what’s right. Don’t get me wrong. I am not advocating that we ditch sociological facts in thinking about church and mission. What I am advocating is to be theologically critical. Is this sociological fact rooted in our created nature or in our sinful nature? Is how we carry out the mission as important as the results we get? Qualitative results matter as much as quantitative results: what kind of Christian faith are we nurturing among new believers if we divide discipleship (following Jesus) from mission (working with Jesus)? What kind of faith are we suggesting when we make engaging diversity optional to following Christ, as something only more mature Christians do?

The HUP is not only problematic in terms of ethnic or cultural diversity. Where do we draw the HUP line in terms of its logic? Already, we see suburban churches that mainly cater to middle-class folks, and inner-city churches catering to lower-income peoples. In fact, in Frost and Hirsch’s book, they even seem to promote through their examples churches or groups based on common interests, like model airplane flying, book clubs, beer drinking, community service. For the sake of “mission” or “outreach,” where do we draw the line to this ever segregating homogenous unit principle? Why not all-male and all-female churches then? Why not a “people with disabilities and their caregivers only” church?

Of course, there is a time and place for everything, including a time and place for gathering with those of common interests or backgrounds or gender. But these can easily be incorporated as specific ministries or small groups within a church plant that embraces the full diversity of humanity in its community.

Finally, I take issue with the implicit reductionism of God’s mission that the HUP assumes and promotes. From my Reformed Christian perspective, God’s mission is “to reconcile to himself all things” through Jesus Christ (Col. 1:20). This vertical reconciliation with God inherently involves a horizontal reconciliation among divided humanity (Eph. 2:11-22). Both vertical and horizontal dimensions, so to speak, are part of God’s mission. The HUP assumes that mission only deals with the vertical relationship, making the horizontal reconciliation a “nice bonus.” Once again, the HUP tears apart what God has joined together.

Can we finally lay to rest this harmful HUP idea and re-embrace God’s vision of diversity for his church? ➤

Rev. Shiao Chong (chaplain@logoscre.ca) is Christian Reformed Church Chaplain at York University, Toronto, Ontario.

## Beware of journalists quoting the Bible



Bert Witvoet

In the November 9, 2010, issue of the German magazine *Der Spiegel*, two German journalists interviewed Dutch populist politician Geert Wilders. Listening carefully to what Wilders said in the *Spiegel* interview, I come away thinking he is not so much against Islam as a religion as he is against Islam as an ideology. The difference is significant. Islam as an ideology is a political movement that wants to dominate the world and subject it, by force, if necessary. Wilders hates ideologies. Islam as an ideology he puts at the same level as fascism and communism. He says he does not hate Muslims nor their religion, but he does believe that the Koran incites people to hatred and ought to be banned in Holland.

It’s at this point of the interview that the journalists set a trap for him.

**SPIEGEL:** *The truth is that you are dividing Dutch society: Here in The Hague, nearly half of the residents come from immigrant families, and many of them are Muslims. And you are calling for the Koran to be banned?*

**Wilders:** *Mein Kampf is banned in our country. But the Koran is worse in terms of inciting hatred and violence. If my left-wing friends were consistent, the Koran would have to be banned.*

**SPIEGEL:** *Are you familiar with this quote from the Prophet? “But these enemies of mine, who did not want me to be their king, bring them here and slay them before me”?*

**Wilders:** *I have read many such passages.*

**SPIEGEL:** *The Prophet cited in this case was Jesus, from Luke, chapter 19, verse 27. Do you admit that there are also calls for violence in the Bible?*

**Wilders:** *There are brutal passages in the Old Testament; the New Testament takes a more moderate approach. But a key difference between Christianity and Islam is that Muslims believe that the Koran contains verbatim the word of God; it is written in the imperative. This precludes a comparison with Christianity.*

Wilders seems to have taken the sting out of the accusation against Christianity, but he fails to notice the sleight of hand when the journalists quote Jesus. That’s understandable, because Wilder, a self-proclaimed atheist, who, although sympathetic to Christianity, is not a student of the Bible. Had he been, he would have pointed out that the quote from Luke 19:27 was ripped out of context. Jesus never called on his followers to resort to violence. In fact, he urges them to turn the other cheek and to love their enemy. Nor did Jesus ever resort to violence himself when he was beaten, spat at and even crucified.

The quote from Luke 19 is taken from a parable Jesus told. He described a king, who was absent from his kingdom for a long time and who asked his servants to use the time of his absence well. Much like other kings in Jesus’ days, this king expected good results, and he even put to death servants who did not want him as king. The point of the parable is not, “Go and do likewise”; i.e., use violence, but, “Use your time well while you’re still under Roman rule and while God delays his coming.” That’s it. There’s no call to violence here at all. His audience would love some violence on Jesus’ part against the Romans, but Jesus would have none of it.

There is a possibility that the two journalists spoke out of ignorance, which would be sloppy on their part, but I have a hunch they knew what they were doing and their main purpose was to trap Wilders.

In the meantime, I’m reflecting on the fact that today, as Christ delays his coming, Christians do well to be familiar with the content of the Bible so that they can disarm those who will use bits of Scripture taken out of context. Christianity is under attack from a variety of sources – atheists, feminists, pro-choice groups, anarchists, promoters of any kind of sexuality – and there’s nothing these folks like to do more than point out that even the New Testament supports various attitudes of hatred, discrimination and acts of violence. Militant Muslims, too, will join that chorus with much enthusiasm to take the sting out of criticism leveled against passages from the Koran that do advocate violence.

Are you prepared for such an onslaught? Would you have recognized on the spot that the statement from Luke 19:27, representing Jesus’ own words, was taken from a parable and that it does not constitute a call to violence?

As we enter the second decade of the 21st century, I have a challenge for you. How well versed are you in biblical knowledge? Have you inspected your spiritual running equipment lately? Are you well supplied with the jacket of faith, the water bottles of salvation and the power-snacks called the Word of God? You never know when a clever journalist might toss you a scrap of Bible verse (or a 1984-type of atheistic inquisition!) – just out of the blue, just at a time when your concordance is relaxing on your shelf at home. ➤

Bert Witvoet is a CC Contributing Editor and lives with his wife, Alice, in St Catharines, Ontario.

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## Letters

### From east to west

I have been reading your paper for at least 50 years. When we lived in Ontario, I saw an ad in *CC* and so I applied for a teaching position in Ladner, BC, met my husband and have lived here ever since!

It is always interesting to read the current news from a Christian viewpoint. Each issue has something of interest to a wide variety of readers and I wish that the younger generation would also start to read their own copies instead of reading ours!

Dorothy Kwantes  
Abbotsford, BC

### Games and high jinks

When our family came to Canada in 1953, one of my dad's (Rev. F. Guillaume) priorities was to enable reformed people from Dutch background to communicate with each other effectively. Soon he was introduced to Mr. Farenhorst and *Calvinist Contact*. He loved writing articles and had lots of ideas how to increase subscriptions.

For a time he collected bulletins from many churches, and culled interesting tidbits for the readers. To attract youth to *CC* he began a chess column, but to hide his identity (pastors were not supposed to spend too much time playing) he became "C. Hess." I was quite attracted to such skulduggery and became a reader of *CC*.

August Guillaume  
Edmonton, AB

### Help *CC* carry on

I am thankful for *Christian Courier* and the faith it propagates. With brother Bert I hope the younger generation will "stand by" *CC*.

Rev. Andrew Kuyvenhoven  
Grand Rapids, MI

### A long-running conversation

Congratulations to *CC* for 65 years of great work! You promote dialogue in our communities that sharpens our experience of faith, culture and citizenship.

Mike Hogeterp  
Ottawa, ON

*Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue*  
(formerly known as the Committee for Contact with the Government).

### How did we meet? Well ...

It must have been in the early 50s that we became subscribers to *CC*. In 1951, a brother moved to Canada too. He was a bit on the shy side, and, to tell the truth, Dutch or Frisian girls were not all that plentiful in the Orillia district. But then there was an ad in *CC*. Three girls in Edmonton would like to get to know a young man in Ontario. My brother replied. He was about 30, and he must have got an answer, because not too long after that we got to meet the young lady. In the late fall of 1957 they tied the knot; he could not have found a better wife. There used to be a saying that whoever was looking for a girl in the paper was not a good lover, but they raised eight children and were a fine family.

Fred Greidanus  
Brampton, ON

### Deferred retirement

Happy 65th birthday! If you were a person you would have reached retirement age. But it is my sincere desire that you will not call it quits for many, many decades to come. As loyal subscribers, my spouse and I always welcome *CC* into our home. It provides us with relevant and interesting news drawn from a wide variety of sources. It offers a healthy variety of feature articles and columns that keep us in touch with our heritage but also challenge us with fresh thinking in how we can best follow Jesus in a contemporary context. May our Lord bless you richly as you press on into his future.

Bob De Moor  
Edmonton, AB  
Editor, *The Banner*

### A tag-along gift

Congratulations on 65 years of publishing the *Calvinist Contact* and now *Christian Courier*. My dad, Tom Lise, always encouraged us to read the magazine as kids. When I got married we received a gift subscription from my parents. We have received the publication ever since, even though we've lived in four provinces.

I enjoy reading the magazine, particularly the church news, editorials and classifieds.

Congratulations to Mr. Farenhorst, Keith, Bert, Harry and Angela for doing an excellent job to relay Biblical truths from a reformed perspective.

Rev. Brian Lise  
Director of Eurovangelism EuroAid

### Language teacher

We have been reading the paper for 58 years. We read it first because it was in Dutch, which we knew at the time. We always like being informed about politics, society and the church. We can read it now in English, so it helped us learn over the years. My congratulations for the new milestone of 65 years; together we pray that the paper may serve future generations as well.

Bill Luymes  
Delta, BC

### Reformed lens

*Christian Courier* in its infancy and mine was a constant mainstay in my family home. The first 20 years of my life *CC* educated and informed my understanding of church, school, community, Christian organizations and the world at large. Everything came through the lens of solid, biblically-wise "reformed folk" across Canada (for the most part).

My Dad often participated by letter and frequent family and neighbourly discussions on the issues of the day. On this diet I grew. While not taking up the writing pen or verbal dialogue as easily as my father, *CC* has nevertheless continued its solid delivery in my own family home the following 40 years, influencing another generation of "reformed folk" along the way.

The unique opportunity and blessing of reading good Christian journalism is a gift. We thank God for it.

Alida (Brinkman) Reitsma  
Bowmanville, ON

## How long have you been reading *CC*?

We are curious who holds the longest-running subscription. If you've been getting *CC* since 1960 or earlier, you could be a contender. Call

1-800-969-4838 to introduce yourself or email [editor@christiancourier.ca](mailto:editor@christiancourier.ca) (or ask a relative to). The winner will receive **five free gift subscriptions** for friends, children and grandchildren!



## Highlights in the 80s

It must be around thirty years ago that I was traveling to St. Catharines to take part in *CC*'s Editorial Advisory Board. Here in Nova Scotia it was easy to feel somewhat isolated from the broader CRC activities, to which *CC* formed an important link. One issue at that time was the move from the Dutch language to all-English. Although it was strongly resisted by some, I pushed hard for English because I knew that my own children would not be reading Dutch. For *CC* to survive at all, the change had to be made, and eventually it was.

With four young sons I wasn't traveling much in those days. A plane ticket to Ontario meant, for me, a rare chance to see my parents and siblings, and I usually added a few family days to the *CC* trips. This, along with the Advisory Board's sometimes challenging discussions, made each Ontario run a highlight of the year.

Anne van Arragon Hutten  
Kentville, NS

## An early version of Google

When I was a young child on a dairy farm, newspapers were an extension of the Rubbermaid boot mat – they dealt with muddy soles and absorbed melting snow. *CC* did not qualify, as its pages were smaller than the *London Free Press*. Moreover, the pages of *CC* were esteemed epistles and thus would never be considered for this lowly task. Instead *CC* was kept. Saved. Once read, it was assigned to a stack on the bottom shelf of the TV stand and then eventually made its way to a box, in a carefully regulated filing system of *CC* issues. It was a sort of library, meticulously managed by my mother. She did a great job. Comparable to a Google web site, if someone was in need of specific information for an in-depth Bible study, "ammunition" for a theological debate or just in need of a spiritual uplift, she could quite quickly find an issue that contained a thought-provoking article, a humorous story, or an inspiring poem. Thus the value of *CC* had long-lasting effects.

Over the years, both my parents have been avid readers of *CC*. Earlier this year my parents decided that in an attempt to down-size their earthly belongings, it was time to get rid of those past issues of *CC*. In a stewardly way, they sent the papers off for recycling. All those *CC* issues had indeed provided a wealth of knowledge and

encouragement in my parents' Christian walk. Those papers had provided an excellent extension for growing in the Christian faith – far more beneficial than being an extension for the Rubbermaid boot mat.

Nancy Horlings  
Smithers, BC



See more letters on page 6.

## Christian Courier

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## News

## Canadian chorus gains international fame with mall 'Hallelujah Chorus'

Marian Van Til

WELLAND, Ontario – Unless you never use a computer and never watch TV news (or read a newspaper), you're already familiar with the "flash mob" heard round the world. At this printing, the YouTube Internet video of Chorus Niagara singing Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus" from *Messiah* in the food court at Welland's Seaway Mall on December 4 has been viewed over 23 million times by viewers in virtually every country where there are computers. The event was planned and set-up by Alphabet Photography in Niagara Falls, Ontario.

Chorus Niagara is the symphony chorus based in the Niagara Peninsula made up of mostly amateur singers. New singers win places in the chorus through auditions, and existing singers are kept sharp by being asked to sing placement auditions again each year. Robert Cooper is the group's conductor. He is from Toronto, is a former CBC choral music and opera producer, also conducts Toronto's Orpheus Choir, and is the recipient of the Order of Canada medal for his outstanding work in choral conducting. Chorus Niagara sings a large variety of music, from the standards in the choral repertoire of Western music to commissioning new works by Canadian composers. They sang Handel's complete *Messiah* on Dec. 11-12, and began their season this year by providing a kind of live "soundtrack" to the classic silent film version of "The Hunchback of Notre Dame," starring Lon Chaney.

As soon as the "Hallelujah" video "went viral" requests for interviews started pouring in. Conductor Cooper appeared on Fox News's "Fox and Friends," seen across the continent. He was interviewed by countless publications, and the chorus participated in a live edition of CTV's Canada AM, filmed in Welland at the "scene of the crime."

Chorus Niagara is not a Christian chorus, as such, but among

its nearly 100 members are numerous Christians. And the chorus more often than not sings Christian works, such as Mozart and Haydn masses, Handel and Haydn oratorios, Bach cantatas and the Mass in B Minor; and Handel's *Messiah* every other year. The best choral music over the centuries of Western civilization came out of the church and/or from Christian composers.

### Unexpected solace in a secular world

Many observers of the video on YouTube have posited theories as to why the chorus's unexpected singing of the "Hallelujah Chorus" in a mall would so profoundly affect people that they would immediately pass on the Internet link to their friends and colleagues, and those friends and colleagues would do the same to people they know – accounting quickly for those 19 million "hits" on YouTube.

Most agree that the reason is more than the great music. People found solace in it, and so unexpectedly, and in such an unexpected place such as a mall, whose focus is material goods. It is the text, conveyed by Handel's great music, that has touched millions of people deeply, bringing many to unexpected tears upon hearing it, they admitted in written responses on the YouTube site. That text says, "Hallelujah! For the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. The kingdom of this world is become the Kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ. And he shall reign forever and ever! Hallelujah!"

One viewer wrote, "This is just another reason why we should awake in the morning rejoicing and glad because we ARE made in His most holy image! What a great and worthy public worship for Our King of Kings."



The video also ignited some controversy on the YouTube site, with Christian and non-Christian viewers trading comments (and in some cases, barbs) about everything from the free celebration of Christmas in our secular society to arguments about theism-atheism and even evolution and creation.

"What a powerful Song for the Lord of Lords! We need to thank Him that we have the freedom to do this open and freely as others do not," wrote a viewer. In contrast to posts like that, and many that expressed gratitude for the power of the Gospel in such music, were posts like this: "Hey, I'm an atheist, and I like this video – just because gods are pretend doesn't mean that humans can't make and perform and appreciate inspiring art!"

Another wrote, "Pretty cool... if you are religious or not," and that sentiment was reiterated by many. But comments from Christians seemed dominant among the thousands on the site. One of those Christian viewers summed it up this way, "The light [emanates] from this event live or over this Internet video. You cannot hide from it. It shines on everyone that hears or sees it. You are immediately convicted. Believers recognize this and it stimulates a profound self appraisal. Do not quibble with the non-believer. The seed has been planted. Move on! No man can do GOOD with out the spirit in him. GOD is GOOD! GOD is LOVE! Faith, hope and love. The greatest of these is LOVE! It is really quite simple."

[In full disclosure: it should be noted that Marian Van Til is a member of Chorus Niagara, but was not present for the flash mob taping.]

### CC as compass

CC played an important part in my life – both personally, spiritually and career-wise.

In the early 80s I studied Journalism in Toronto. I was questioning my faith and especially the Christian Reformed Church (CRC). In my second year, the ONLY job I could get was as a free-lance reporter for CC doing a "good news beat." It wasn't what I really wanted, but it did get me off the farm. And it changed my life and perception of the CRC. This was around the time Bert Witvoet was coming on board CC.

I met so many wonderful people: artists such as Matt Cupido, hospital chaplain Rev. Jac Guezebroek, the staff at the Institute for Christian Studies, the Christian Labour Association and Christian Farmer's Federation. The people I met were patient and kind, and showed me a side of the Reformed faith that I had never really understood or experienced. I began to realize that this was a deep and profound expression of the Christian faith and I did not want to turn my back on it.

I worked for CC five years after graduation, again the ONLY job I could get. I had really hoped to get into a community newspaper, but God had a different community in mind. I'll never forget some of the staff social events, such as a trip to Toronto for an art exhibition, preceded by a lecture at the ICS. Bert found the perfect, affordable supper joint – the cafeteria at the Toronto Psychiatric Hospital. Amazingly, we left no one behind there!

I am somewhat amazed that CC has been able to survive 65 years, especially as so many faith-based publications have not. There is a lot of competition for people's time and loyalty. It speaks to the people and product that God has blessed CC with the means to carry on. It is encouraging to see that CC is still a place that entrusts young people to leadership and writing.

Margaret Griffioen-Drenth  
Dundas, ON

### Coffee klatch

Sometime in the 1950s *Calvinist Contact* badly needed new subscribers. They offered a prize when you got a certain amount of new subscriptions. A coffee percolator was one of those prizes. My Sarnia nephews and nieces heard of this and boy, did they get busy. Maybe, just maybe they would be able to get one of those percs in time to give their Aunt Bertha a St. Nick present. And they did! Who could refuse those eager, expectant faces when they tried to get another customer, usually right after the morning service?

I've been getting CC ever since the beginning and would not do without it. Neither without coffee. The percolator died long ago, but CC... long may it live!

Berta Dekker  
London, ON

### Worthwhile expense

63 years ago we came to Canada and we went to the Christian Reformed church in Hamilton. There we found *Calvinist Contact*. We took it home, but we said at first, it cost too much. A neighbor said let us read it together, so we did that for three years. Then we moved to Vinemount. We couldn't miss the paper with all the news from St Catharines, Grimsby and Hamilton. The classified was for us really important (still is). Aug 12, 1996 carried an obit from my late husband Harvey. Still I pass it on to some friends. I don't want to miss my *Christian Courier*.

The Lord's blessing on your work.

Mrs. J. Haanstra  
Dunnville, ON

### All to God's glory

Congratulations on your 65th year of CC. I have been reading the CC for over 35 years. I don't agree on all the articles but thank God for some of them. I pray that you will have articles that honour God and bring glory to his name.

Charmaine Haan  
Barrie, ON

### 'Voice of Aslan' says the Christ-Lion could be Mohammed, Buddha

LONDON (TCI) – Aslan, the Christ-like character in C.S. Lewis' Narnia books, could also represent the prophet Mohammed – or Buddha, according to a startling new claim by actor Liam Neeson. Neeson provides the voice of Aslan in the three Narnia movies so far released.



Liam Neeson.

During his life C.S. Lewis was clear that the famous lion, who appears in all seven Narnia books, is based on Christ. But Neeson insists, "Aslan symbolizes a Christlike figure, but he also symbolizes for me Mohammed, Buddha and all the great spiritual leaders and prophets over the centuries."

Neeson's controversial comments have angered some of Lewis' fans, and prompted accusations that Neeson has neglected the author's legacy to be "politically correct."

Walter Hooper, who was briefly Lewis' secretary, said, "It is nothing whatever to do with Islam. Lewis would have simply denied that. He wrote that 'the whole Narnian story is about Christ.' Lewis could not have been clearer."

William Oddie, a former editor of the *Catholic Herald* and fan of the *Chronicles of Narnia*, said, "Aslan is clearly established from the very beginning of the whole canon as being a Christ figure."

Throughout the seven Narnia novels Aslan steers the children away from evil and encourages them to take the right path. And at the end of the first book in the series, "The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe," Aslan sacrifices his life to save Narnia from an evil witch, before rising again.

The third film based on the Narnia stories, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, was released in early December and is currently in theatres.



## News

## Authentic Catholic universities help resist 'secular dictatorship,' says cardinal

BOSTON, Mass. (CNA) – The authentically Catholic university helps students resist “secularist dictatorship” by keeping Jesus Christ at the center of its mission and by exposing the moral bankruptcy of contemporary culture, Cardinal Raymond Burke said early this month.

The cardinal's comments came in an address at St. Thomas More College in Boston. In a lengthy discussion of the nature of Catholic higher education, Cardinal Burke said that a Catholic university faithful to its identity will help students give an account of their faith and help them resist “the secularist dictatorship which would exclude all religious discourse from the professions and from public life in general.”

He declared Jesus Christ, the “fullness” of God's revelation, as “the first and chief teacher at every institution of Catholic higher education.”

“A Catholic college or university at which Jesus Christ alive in his church is not taught, encountered in the liturgy, and through prayer and devotion, and followed in a life of virtue is not worthy of the name,” he asserted.

Jesus' presence is not something “extraneous” to the



Cardinal Raymond Burke: In education, too, we need to be true to the Gospel.

pursuit of truth, because he alone inspires and guides professors and students to remain faithful in their pursuits and not “fall prey to the temptations which Satan cleverly offers to corrupt us.”

### Combating virulent secularism

Cardinal Burke lamented the fall of many Catholic colleges and universities that have become “Catholic in name only.” The Catholic university is needed more than ever in a society “marked by a virulent secularism which threatens the integrity of every aspect of human endeavor and service,” Burke said.

“How tragic that the very secularism which the Catholic university should be helping its students to battle and overcome has entered into several Catholic universities, leading to the grievous compromise of their high mission.”

On the issues of creating curricula and hiring professors, Cardinal Burke advised “special care,” noting the poor religious formation of many young Catholics.

“Given the religious illiteracy which marks our time and in fidelity to the seriousness with which university studies should be undertaken, there is really no place for engaging in speculative theology and certainly no time to waste on superficial and tendentious theological writings of the time,” the cardinal said. He concluded, “My reflection is offered to assist us all in seeking always first the truth and love by which we serve others and our world well by serving God first.”

## Bible Institute for prisoners opens in Kenya

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (CBI) – Crossroad Bible Institute has opened another international distribution center, this one in Kenya. This is CBI's fourth center in Africa. It also has centers in many other places worldwide. The institute, run in North America by H. David Schuringa, who is an ordained minister in the Christian Reformed Church, has been approved for support by the CRC general synod.

In Kenya, as in many African countries, prisons are dirty, overcrowded, plagued by disease and lacking adequate health care. Due to these factors, a 2008 report stated, nearly 50 prisoners die monthly. Mothers often raise their babies or young children in these dangerous conditions.

The CBI program will begin operation in the Naivasha Prison, a tightly regulated facility with 3,000 inmates, and four other prisons. Kenya has approximately 50,000 people behind bars.

The director of CBI Kenya is Jefferson Gathu, who also heads Cistern Materials Translation and Publishing Center, an organization that provides Christian literature for native tribes of Kenya and other parts of Africa.

As in other developing nations, CBI Instructors not only hand-deliver the Bible-study lessons and letters of discipleship to the students in prison but also provide inmates with basic necessities like food, medical supplies, blankets, soap and toilet paper. Gathu also heads efforts to organize

medical camps, construct prison libraries and aid in re-entry of prisoners into society.

### Making burdens light

Gathu is assisted by Samuel Chege, who said he appreciates the CBI discipleship program, explaining, “Imprisoned people have heavy burdens of loneliness, guilt, bitterness, depression or confusion. We want inmates to know that they are capable, appreciated and doing a good job.”

CBI's international program director, Cynthia Williams, recently attended the official CBI Kenya grand opening. Among the 120 guests were senior prison officials and chaplains, bishops, pastors and others.



H. David Schuringa: President of CBI in North America.

“We are grateful for the shared vision of our Kenyan brothers and sisters and enthusiastic about the opportunity to work with them to serve God's people in prison and re-entering society in their home country,” says David Schuringa.

Crossroad Bible Institute's prison ministry has operated for 26 years. With 40,000 students, CBI now has 12 international distribution centers on six continents and several openings pending. Visit CBI for more information. CBI's program is provided at no cost to prisoners and their families.

## Iran to execute pastor for renouncing Islam

TEHRAN, Iran (CCO) – Youcef Nadarkhani, a 32-year-old Protestant pastor who became a Christian at the age of 19, has been sentenced to death for renouncing Islam, reports the International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran.

Nadarkhani is the pastor of an approximately 400-person congregation in the northern city of Rasht. In the southern city of Shiraz, another Christian pastor, Behrouz Sadegh-Khanjani, 35, is facing a possible indictment for apostasy.

“This is part of a greater trend of persecution against Christians,” said Firouz Sadegh-Khanjani, brother of Behrouz and member of the Church of Iran's executive council.

The “draconian language in the verdict makes it very clear that the Iranian authorities mean business,” said Leonard

Leo, chair of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom. “He could be executed at any time. And for what? For being a Christian.”

“We call upon the Obama administration and the international community to use every means available to raise this issue and demand the unconditional release of Mr. Nadarkhani,” said Leo.

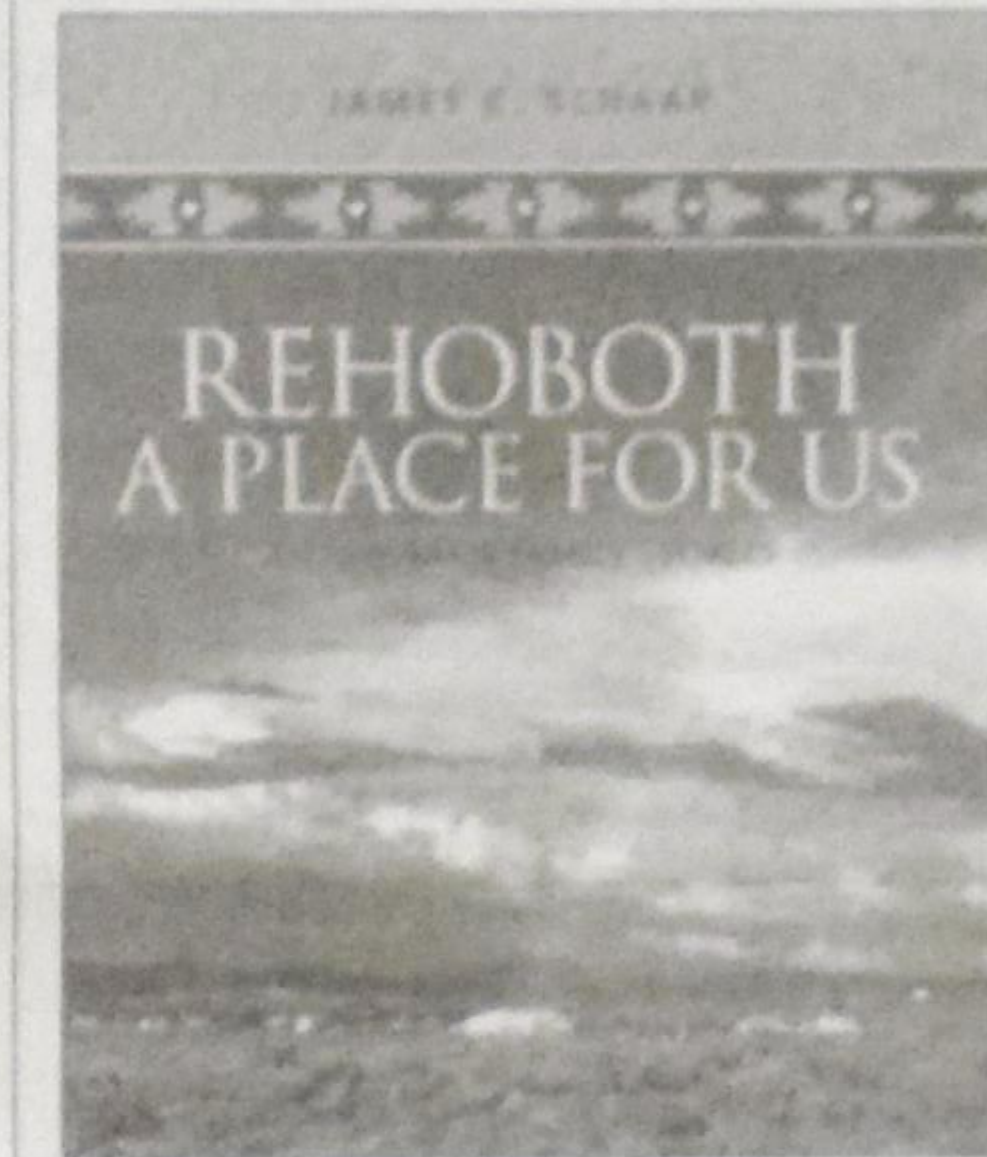
Nadarkhani's attorney has appealed the verdict to Iran's supreme court. But he noted, “More and more, the Iranian judiciary is departing from any recognized form of due process, issuing arbitrary judgments based on vague, open-ended laws,” said Rhodes. “Laws and evidence are increasingly irrelevant and unrelated to judicial outcomes in Iran.”

## New Mexico: Christian school marks 110-year CRC ministry among Navajos

REHOBOTH, N.M. (CRCNA) More than 40 people associated in one way or another with Rehoboth Christian School gathered last month to share memories and tell stories of the Christian Reformed Church's more than century-long involvement and ministry with the Navajo people in New Mexico.

Also noted was the publication of a new, colorful, coffee-table book *Rehoboth, A Place For Us: An Album of Family Stories* by James Schaap. Schaap is the author of more than 20 books and countless short stories. He is a professor of English at Dordt College in Sioux Center, Iowa.

“I'm grateful to see so many people here today who invested their lives among the Navajo people,” said Art Bosscher, who worked in maintenance at the school for 80 years. Former teachers, dormitory monitors, and others shared what they did at Rehoboth and what it meant to them. “What we're talking about is God's story told through people such as us,” said Charlie Bosscher, who attended school for many years at Rehoboth. His father is Art Bosscher. “I was a minority among the students, but they made me feel welcome, and I made many friends,” said Bosscher.



Others spoke of what it meant for them to volunteer at the school or teach at the school or to, in the early years, give nickels in their CRC Sunday schools to help “our Indian cousins.”

The cover of Schaap's book features a rainbow dropping down from the sky, shining heavenly light onto the school. But the book itself, containing the

stories of 12 families, asserts that the CRC's ministry has not always been bright and shiny and has been, in fact, counterproductive, if not detrimental, at times.

### Learning from mistakes

“We have made mistakes,” said Ron Polinder, former executive director of the school. In the new book itself, Polinder writes in the Foreword, “In hindsight, we recognize the paternalism we brought to our mission. Certainly, we thought the native people would be thrilled that we have come to teach them . . . while we hope we were worthy of our calling as educators, we learned more from the Native people than they did from us.”

While acknowledging those mistakes, Polinder said that the CRC has remained committed for more than a century to working with the people at Rehoboth. The church has never abandoned its “calling to the area,” which is an example of God's amazing grace at work.

Polinder helped Schaap identify families to feature in the book and also helped to connect him with them. “To ask them for their stories was not something you do cheaply. It was an enormous privilege that they were willing to trust us with their stories. . . . So often white people have come down there and not really tried to get to know them for the wonderful, loving, faithful people that they are.”

“If one does any study whatsoever of denominational ministries on U.S. reservations or Canadian reserves, my guess is that finding a successful one that has lasted for 100 years – and one which has basically stayed in the same hands of a single, small denomination – would be difficult,” said Schaap in an email interview.

Over the course of more than a century of outreach work to the Navajo, said Polinder, “God, in his grace and good providence, saw fit to bless the work of his stumbling servants.”



## Columns

## Everyday Christian

Cathy Smith

# An epiphany for Epiphany

Thought I would share another true story that happened last year.

My husband does not attend church. He is not what most Christians would call a believer, although, in God's own infinitesimal time, little things happen that I consider hopeful. So, for the past thirty-three years, I have attended church alone. When my children were young, it was sometimes challenging to make two Sunday services with all three of them in tow and clean, but I persevered. There was an embarrassingly long period of time where I indulged in constant envy of the handsome and whole families who shared a pew, where I stoked my anger at God for not changing Mark's heart for my convenience (and his good), where I nursed resentment that God hadn't made my children more compliant. I prayed demanding prayers, imploring God to make my life what I wanted it to be. It was exhausting, pushing the wheelbarrow of self-pity to church with me every week while simultaneously pasting a smile on my face!

Time passed. My children grew up. I grew up. I got used to attending church alone. The church got used to my attending church alone. In his own time, God relieved me of some burdens and enabled me to carry others with a smaller bucket of self-pity and a more genuine smile.

### To see God's glory

Two weeks ago an older lady drew me aside after the afternoon service. She and her husband have been members of our church for a few years now. I don't know her well, but we've had a few casual conversations during coffee hour. She gave me a quick hug and here's what she said: "I'm so encouraged when I see you coming to church twice every Sunday. It must be hard to come alone, but you

come so faithfully." For an instant, I was dumbstruck. It had been so long since I had thought of church attendance as a hardship. I thanked her and told her that once upon a time it was hard, but now I have a lot more peace. I enjoy church, I said, and my husband is generally supportive of my desire to live a Christian life.

**We pray that God will use us . . . to his glory.  
Can we recognize and believe it when he does?**

It wasn't a long conversation, but one that has stayed with me. Here's the epiphany: What if all those unanswered prayers of mine, for my church attendance to be fulfilling and perfect according to my perceived needs, were actually heard . . . but shelved for this woman's need of encouragement at this time in her life? That thought triggers a surge of protest. Thirty-three years of disappointment and unrealized hopes and dreams for someone else's spiritual encouragement? Would that be fair of God to use my life in that way? Is that manipulative or wondrous? Or indeed, a wondrous manipulation? Can I, like Simeon, open my eyes to see a light for revelation? And what if my fellow churchgoer knew how often I went to church mad, sad, and pouty? We pray that God will use us, that he will use our half-hearted grumbling bits of service to his glory. Can we recognize and believe it when he does?

On the other hand, perhaps she was merely seeking to encourage me, and her comment was a gift, a God-moment, a word of divine affirmation from one sin-stained saint to another. Perhaps this was the day and the way God chose to show me how much he has changed me. Or was it both? An ordinary reminder of providence in an ordinary setting that our lives are linked and we are the communion of saints; an ordinary reminder that faith grows, that the



"Simeon sees Jesus" by Kirt Harmon, a contemporary painter from Utah.

Word of God does not return void, that the Spirit is busy.

That moment lit my world like a haloed encounter. We confess that God works all things for our salvation. So often doubt nibbles at my faith, but thanks be to God, today my eyes have seen.

Star of wonder, star of might, guide me to thy perfect light!

Cathy Smith is a contributing editor with CC. She lives in Wyoming, Ontario.



## Patchwork Words

Melissa Kuipers

# For the love of all things handmade

Over the past few years there has been a growing movement towards buying handmade gifts. Massive craft and artisan shows like the One of a Kind Show in Toronto, Vancouver, Chicago and New York draw thousands of buyers before the holidays each year. Websites like *Etsy.com* and *100milefinds.com* allow artists to pay a small fee to feature their wares and sell them online. *Etsy*, which began in 2005, has thousands of sellers and millions of users in more than 150 countries. A bit of *Etsy* browsing will show that many buyers and sellers are sporting the logo which states, "I took the handmade pledge" on their pages, a pledge to "buy handmade for myself and my loved ones, and request that others do the same for me."

Mass production and the technological revolution have made the need to make things at home virtually obsolete and in many cases more costly, not to mention time consuming. If time is money, why would we bother?

### One vs. many

It seems something in us longs for the human touch. We live in a consumer culture, where objects and possessions have become extremely important, which has also made them extremely impersonal. As a backlash to mass production, a societal movement is growing which encourages people to relearn craft and home economy skills and make their own gifts or purchase something someone else has lovingly and imaginatively designed.

There are probably a number of reasons for the growing popularity of the hand-made. In our quick-paced society, we value the time invested in a hand-made item, the uniqueness of a one-of-a-kind gift and the preciousness of the individual attention that goes into a crafted piece. Also,



Toronto's One-of-a-Kind show attracts 150,000 shoppers during its 10-day run.

as we are becoming more and more aware of the unjust conditions in which many people work in mass-produced businesses, we want to buy in good conscience, knowing our purchases are ethically made when we buy handmade. Furthermore, many concerns arise out of the distance that exists between manufacturing and consuming. *Etsy* administrators claim, "We created *Etsy* to help [producers and consumers] reconnect, and swing the pendulum back to a time when we bought our bread from the baker, food from the grocer, and shoes from the cobbler. Our vision is to build a new economy and present a better choice: Buy, Sell, and Live Handmade."

The desire to buy local is met in craft sales and 100 Mile Finds, enabling individuals to support our communities' industries and also to cut back on the cost that shipping products has on the environment.

### A new home ec

Of course hand-made gift-giving takes a little more time and initial consideration, and doing it yourself (DIYing)

takes foresight. To pledge to the handmade eliminates the convenience of running to the mall and picking up an item at the last minute, or returning something which just isn't your style. As well, the time, effort and skill required to create lovable items from scratch often requires that sellers charge a little more for these items than their mass produced equivalents.

Handmade shopping does not answer the problem of consumerism. Hopefully, however, the fact that more and more people are opting for home-made gifts is reducing our consumption as a culture. More thought into the buying process reduces the likelihood of needless shopping. If we are intentional about how we spend our money, and willing to spend a little more on high-quality gifts, we are less like to contribute to the cycle of consuming cheap and highly disposable items.

Sometimes I'm a little saddened by the lack of home economic skills among my generation and younger. While my grandmother was required to knit, sew and learn other skills as a child, I am having to teach myself these skills as an adult. Times have changed, but I feel that there is something intrinsic about our need to work with our hands, to create and to design, and I fear that too few young people these days have the skills to explore possible creative outlets. Taking part in the creative process, either personally or through supporting an artist, reminds us that we are made in the image of a creative God who delights in beauty and has granted us the gift of doing the same.

Melissa Kuipers ([mckuip@gmail.com](mailto:mckuip@gmail.com)) is a full-time student completing a Masters of Arts in Creative Writing at the University of Toronto.





## Reviews

# The Shepherd's Tale: A wolf in shepherd's clothing?

Brett Alan Dewing

In 2003, one of the most lamented cancellations in TV history saw Joss Whedon's space western, *Firefly*, gone before a full season on the air. The show followed an oddball crew of pirates in the new frontiers of space and featured one of TV's rare well-rounded Christian characters, Shepherd Book. After a somewhat successful film wrap-up, 2005's *Serenity*, the show's characters have been featured in a few graphic novels, the most recent of which came out this month.

In *Serenity: The Shepherd's Tale*, Zack Whedon writes from his brother Joss's outline. The story is what *Firefly* fans have been clamoring for – the backstory of Derriel Book, the Christian preacher (or shepherd) onboard the pirate ship *Serenity*. Throughout the series and the film that bears the ship's name, Shepherd Book presided as what I term a paci-fist, someone whose mysterious past has both soured them to violence and left them with a profound efficiency for it.

That past is demystified in these 56 pages which read almost as quickly as your average 22-page comic. Zack proves to have a good ear for the world, a future culture blended from Chinese and American, though too many of his nameless extras sound like Kaylee and not individuals in their own right. Chris Samnee's art complements the story well, never taking you out of the flow of the narrative.

Said narrative is told *Memento*-style, in six-page vignettes arranged in reverse chronology. We start with the previously offscreen death scene of Book, who passes away violently in the *Serenity* movie. From there, we move back through his life, seeing a number of distinct incarnations of the man, linked by a belief that, as he says in the series, "the journey is the worthier part." I won't spoil the story by explaining those different Books to you, but I will speak a bit about the story as it relates to the character's faith.

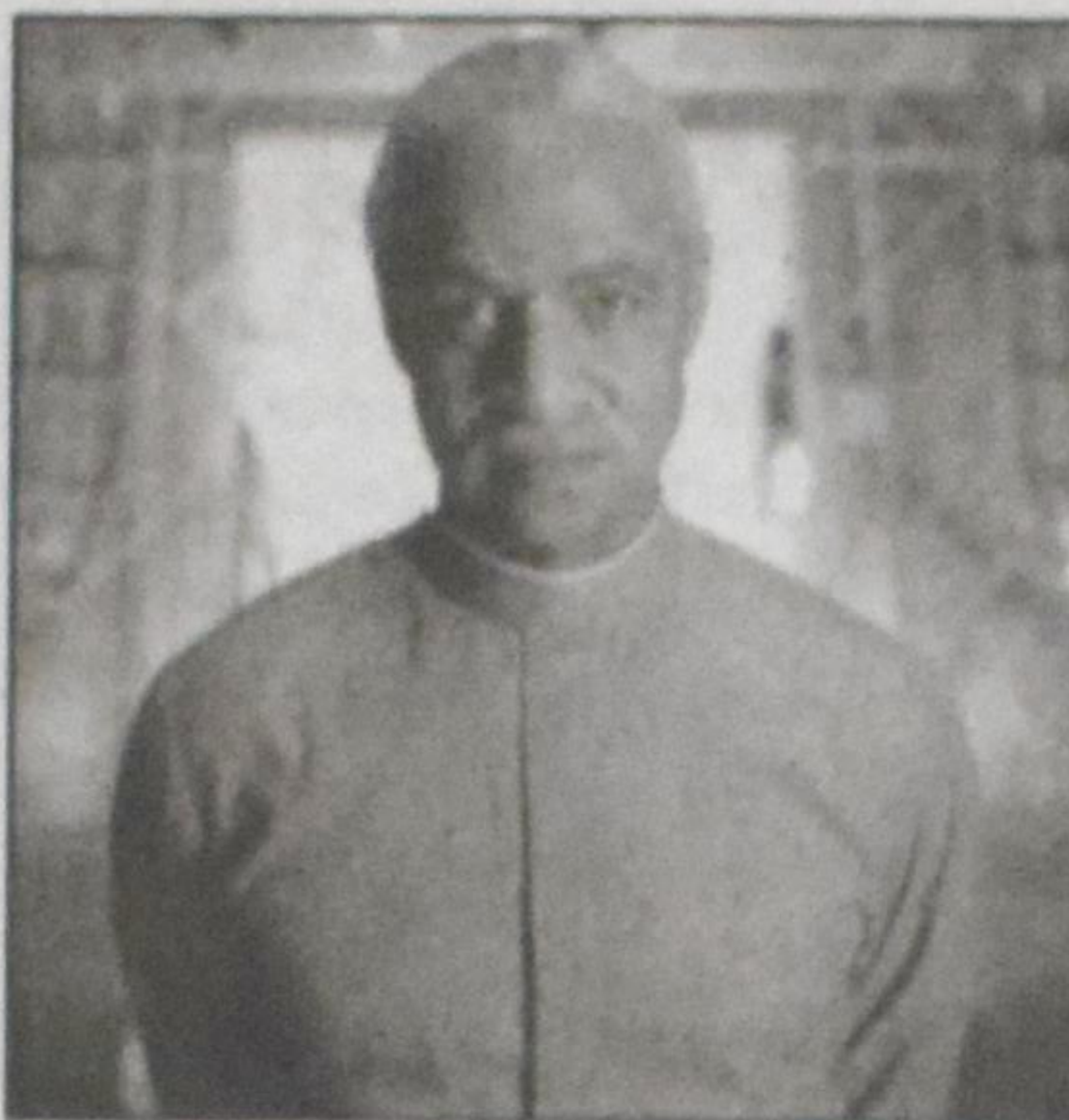
Before we see Book's involvement with the Alliance, we are treated to a triptych exploring his religious life. We see his conversion, his reason for joining the *Serenity* crew, and a scene that acts as a short summary of the crewmembers' different reactions to his Christianity. It is no surprise that the other characters don't understand faith. From past

experience, I would guess that the writers share that ignorance, but Book himself doesn't reveal any of that confusion in his own interior monologue. For that I am exceedingly happy. Joss's feelings about "the Sky Bully" are well-known, and I have always felt a tension in his treatment of Shepherd Book that thankfully never quite tipped the writers' hand.

The crew in large part displays an understanding of religion as a works-based debit-credit system. I suspect that this is the attitude of the Whedons as well, but it certainly is the predominant misunderstanding about faith. Book is ever the cryptic mystic, and so we don't get a clear sense of his theology, but given this new tome, we can piece together a little more. The scene of his conversion is appropriately muddy. This is a Chinese-American

melting pot, after all, and Book's meditations on the meaning of life are fittingly Buddhist-lite. However, by luck more than anything, they lead him to a Christian order, where he eventually becomes a monk.

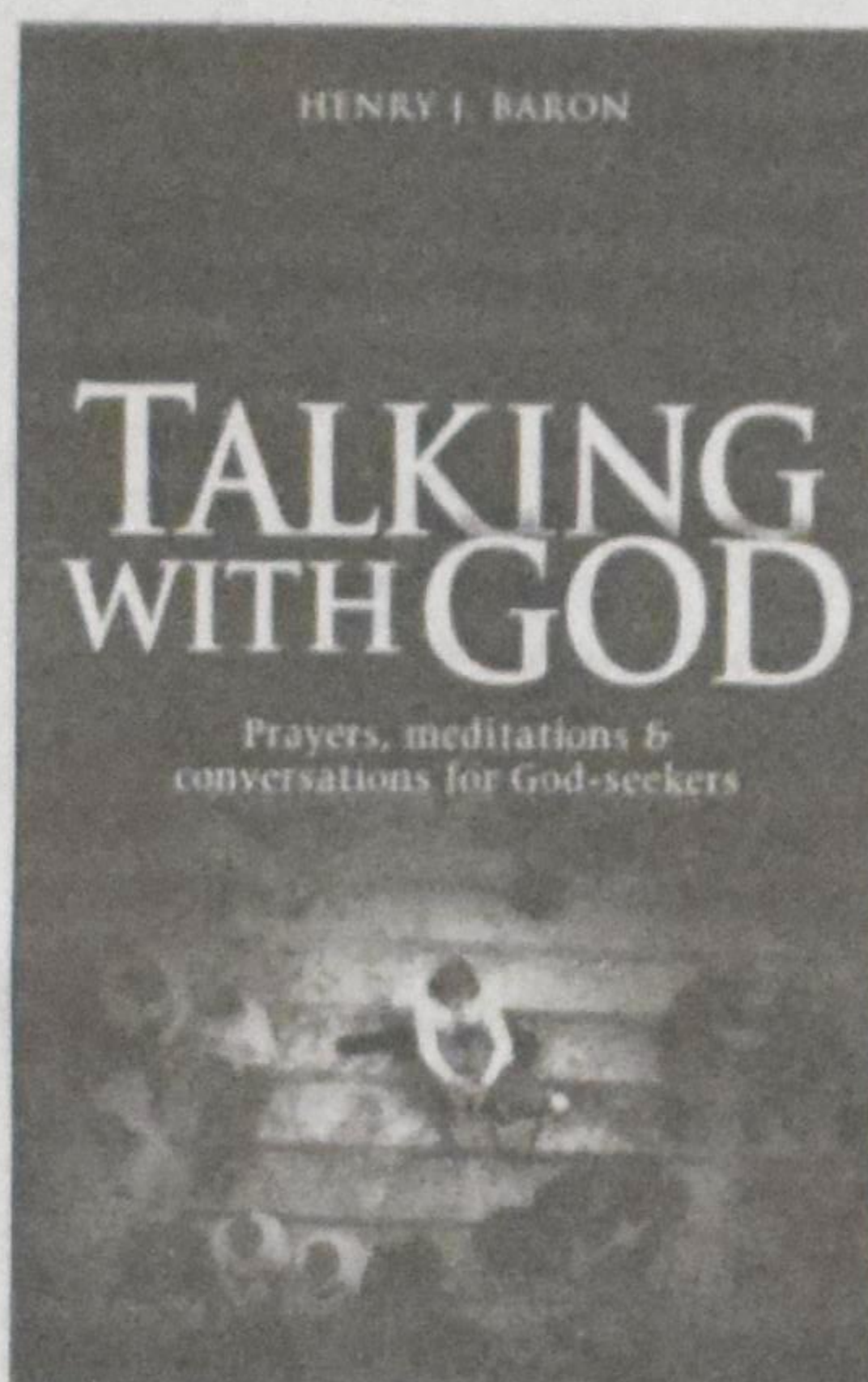
The scene in which he leaves his monastery is perhaps the best-realized scene in the book. He tells his superior that he can no longer live a secluded life in prayer when there is an ever-



expanding universe of unreached people. For this reason, he chooses the life of an undercover missionary, traveling the 'verse in order to spread God's Word. The scene closes with a recitation of the Prayer of Saint Francis (a text that was used prominently in Joss's season 6 finale of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*). It is in these words that we see the clearest creed of Shepherd Derriel Book, a man who lived as an instrument of peace.

You couldn't ask for much more from an atheist writer than the truly inspiring character of Shepherd Book given his own character study and coming through it with Christian dignity.

Brett Alan Dewing is Features Editor with CC.



## A devotional for all occasions

Henry Baron,  
*Talking with God:  
Prayers, meditations  
& conversations for  
God-seekers.*  
Bellingham, WA:  
Excell Publishing,  
2011 pp.244.

Bert Witvoet

In his book  
*Talking with God*,  
Henry Baron has a  
quiet conversation

with God about many things: losing a loved one, hunger and poverty in Africa, church worship, forgiveness, graduates, school, ascension, faith, doubt, marriage, beauty of nature, incurable sickness, fear, retirement, you name it. Baron is interested in everything that has to do with life, and he wants to talk with God about it. The result is a golden bowl full of prayers (Rev. 5:8) that are like casual conversations with a friend, except that the friend is called "Lord."

The language is down-to-earth and unpretentious. But the author always finds an unusual way of lifting things out of the ordinary into a holy moment. Yet he does not try to be overly pious or lofty. Since Baron is professor emeritus of English, one can count on poetic sensitivities and the total avoidance of clichés and religious jargon. In fact, some of the talks are poems.

### Smiling critique

Baron asks a lot of questions, and he does it in a way that is both profound and humorous. In "Sides," he asks God, "We wonder, Lord, whose side are you on? Are you liberal or conservative? Are you for women preachers and acceptance of gays? We'd like to know that, Lord. It would make things so much easier. Synods could simply chant, 'Who is on the Lord's side...' And delegates could start lining up, on one side or the other."

Raising the question does not mean the author finds the answer; yet, he resolves the issue in one way or another. You have to read between the lines.

Something that Baron often does is take a critical look at how humans behave. But more often than not he includes himself in those who fail to live up to God's expectations. The result is a non-judgmental analysis

that helps us to do better, and, above all, that encourages us to seek grace and forgiveness. For example, in "Number One" Baron observes that "every eel wants to become a whale. It's fallen human nature to look out for number one." Notice the fine biblical insight here. So often we hear it said, "It's human nature to make mistakes," or "I'm only human." Baron adds "fallen" to his statement, and that makes all the difference. The comment leaves us without excuse and unfailingly brings us to the cross.

### Probing honesty

Many prayers end with an item called "To Ponder." In "Number One" we are asked to ponder the question "What's number one in your life?" That calls for self-examination. In "Praying" the author asks God what he thinks of our prayers: "God, do our many prayers ever make you sick?" What does God think of our public prayers at church and school meeting, which "function like a chairperson's gavel that calls the meeting to order"? And so the "To Ponder" is "What do you think about public prayers?"

The book breathes the notion that religion is for all of life, and that nothing is unimportant in the eyes of God. In fact, God wants us to pray not just for meals and before going to bed, but he wants to have a relationship with him, says Baron in "Prayer." What kind of prayer does God want us to pray? Baron's God replies by saying, you begin "by being honest with yourself and me; by simply telling me what's on your mind, what's in your heart." This captures the essence of *Talking with God*. It teaches us how to pray in a more natural way.

Here is a devotional that is unlike most I have read. It's actually a compilation of various reflections that Baron wrote over the years for the monthly publication of his home church, Neland Avenue Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan. I recommend it for your personal use, but also for public occasions. I know; I used his "If I were a preacher" for our congregational meeting a few weeks ago. It's both funny and uplifting. In a gentle way it pokes fun at his own preacher ambitions but brings them down to earth with a smile: "But I'm not a preacher, Lord. I suffer neither from a preacher's delusion of grandeur nor from his nightmare of despair. Like most of us, I just listen to them."

Bert Witvoet is a Contributing Editor with CC. He lives with his wife Alice in St. Catharines, Ont.





## Features

# Calvinist glue, Reformed window: The first 50 years of CC

Angela Reitsma Bick

At age 65, *Christian Courier* is older than Dordt College, Trinity Christian College, the Institute for Christian Studies, the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee and the blue Psalter Hymnal. It's also worth noting that *The Banner* hired its first full-time editor only one year before *CC* began, and that the Christian Reformed Church of North America didn't open a Canadian office until 1982 – when Calvinists in Canada had already been disseminating Reformed thought through the pages of *CC* for 37 years.

The first issue of *Canadian Calvinist* is published in August, 1945, with founding father Rev. Paul De Koekkoek of Alberta as editor. The paper is initially a kind of glue, holding the Dutch immigrant community together. But the Reformed perspective encourages integration, not an enclave. In one of his first editorials, De Koekkoek urges Calvinists to apply for Canadian citizenship once the war is over, "to enable them to take active part in the public life of the nation."

The next several years feature *CC*'s first debate (on the difference between Christian and public schools); the first birth announcement (Mary Ellen Wildschut); the first letter to the editor (over a typo); and the first ad (for "alle maten wooden shoes, even fancy ones").

In 1949, the Ontario upstart *Contact*, run by two Johns (Vander Vliet and Vellinga) enters the picture. Two years later, it merges with the original *CC* to become *Calvinist CONTACT*. (Its first issue uses a bigger font for "Contact," correctly indicating which paper's vision had won out). In the 1950s, using a mix of Dutch and English, the new paper serves the post-war influx of immigrants from Holland well.

In 1954, under the leadership of journalist Ad Otten, *CC* increases publication from a bi-monthly to a weekly paper. Its news coverage is often a Dutch rewrite of the national English papers. One item of note: the newly-expanded Hamilton District Christian High School is reported as having tuition fees between \$1.50 and \$3.00 per week, depending on bus use.

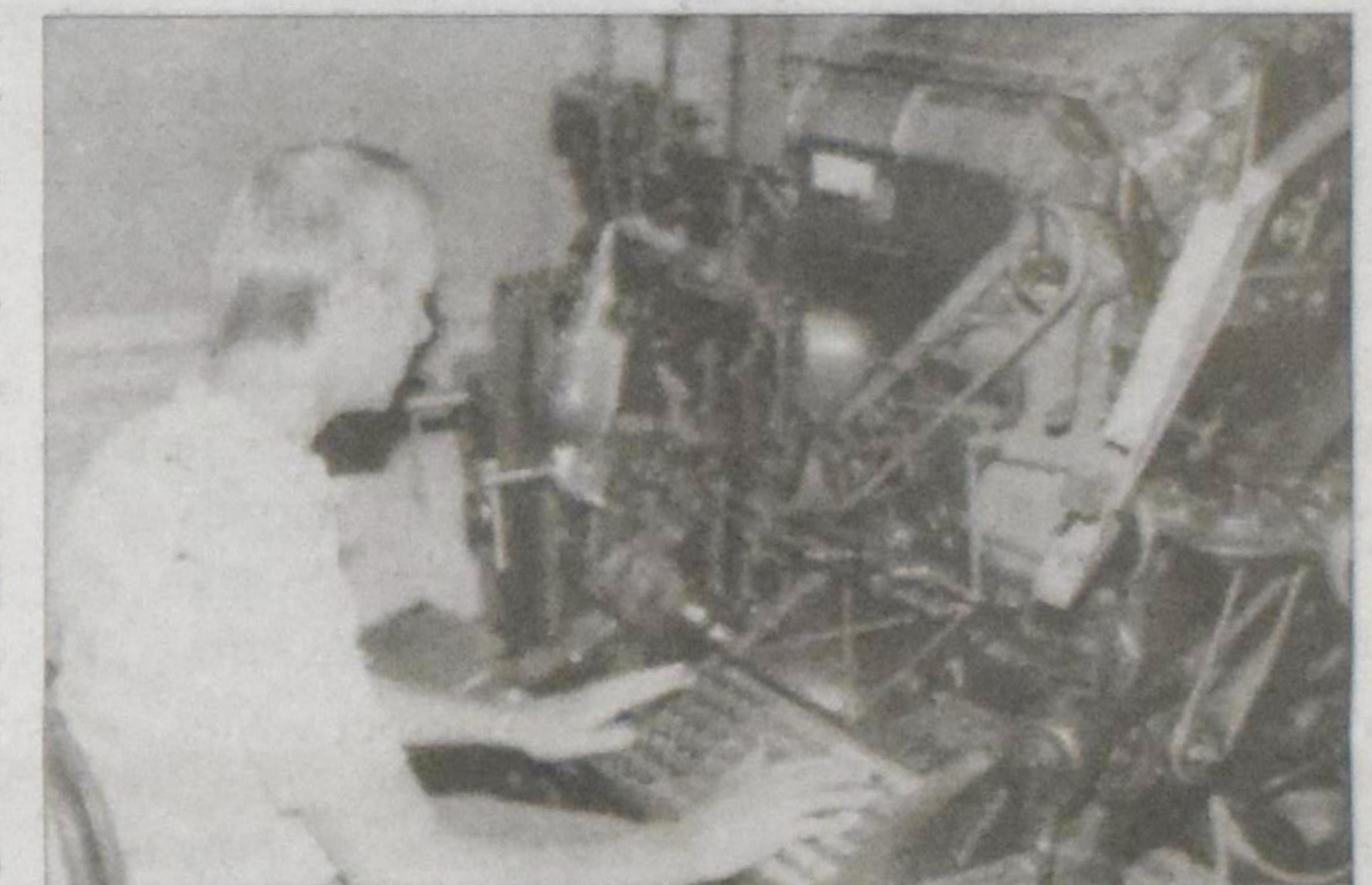
When Dick Farenhorst takes over as editor in 1959, *CC* is well-positioned to report and reflect on issues facing the Reformed community in Canada, such as second worship services, trade unions, Christian education and women in office. By 1973, Dutch is limited to four pages of the paper. The editor's skills at peacemaking are evident after the publication of *Out of Concern for the Church* in 1971; he organizes a unity conference to give CRC leaders a chance to discuss the controversy. Farenhorst is mourned as a "good Christian leader, a trusted counsellor [and] a wise man with a God-fearing heart" when he passes away from cancer in 1976.



Bert Witvoet is surrounded by his predecessors: (counterclockwise from far left) Dick Farenhorst, John Vander Vliet, Keith Knight, Paul De Koekkoek, Ad Otten and John Gritter.



Alice and Bert Witvoet subscribed to *CC* from the beginning of their marriage. In 1961, when this picture was taken, Bert was a teacher at Hamilton District Christian High School. Little did the couple know that one day, some 20 years later, Bert would be appointed editor of *CC*.



This picture was taken at Guardian Publishing, Hamilton, Ont. The machine is a typesetting/lithographic machine used to set copy for the old *Calvinist Contact* during its early years. Jerry Kool is the typesetter.



A newer Compugraphic Typesetting Machine is used at Knight Publishing Limited in St. Catharines for the *Calvinist Contact*. Helen van Oostveen, the receptionist looks on. We do not have the name of the typesetter.



1946



1964



1975



1979

## Middle-aged CC dreams

In 1985, *CC*'s assistant editor Ellen Zwart makes a few predictions about the future of *CC*. She imagines a future editor, a woman, "sitting at a computer terminal scanning the day's stories sent in by reporters from across Canada and around the globe." That turns out to be surprisingly accurate, considering how limited computer use was twenty-five

years ago. She also wonders if the vision of a Christian daily newspaper will ever be realized – a Calvinist version of *The National Post*. Since dropping from a weekly to a biweekly in 1999 that seems less likely. *CC*'s future remains, as always, in God's capable hands.

- Ed.



## Features



Our longest serving employee, Kim Yungblut, began in 1981. Here she shares a laugh with Bert Witvoet.

### The second quarter

Under Keith Knight's editorship ('76-'82), *CC* develops an emphasis on news, both within the CRC church and beyond. It covers the opening of Redeemer College and The King's College, and notes in 1977 that Calvin College now allows "social dancing in a Christian manner." When Rev. Andrew Kuyvenhoven becomes the first Canadian editor of *The Banner* in 1979, *CC* loses a significant number of subscribers to the older, U.S.-based

church magazine (also a weekly publication at that time).

In 1980, *CC* is imperilled when its mortgage holder, George VerKaik, dies and a daughter from Michigan inherits the mortgage. Hoping to move and then run the paper herself, she calls up the mortgage. The takeover attempt, however, falls through when eight Niagara businessmen guarantee a bank loan for \$80,000 to save *CC* and keep it on Canadian soil.

"By laughing about everything, we surrender it to God," Bert Witvoet quotes in an early editorial. Well-known for wittiness and a love for word play, Witvoet writes an esti-

mated 2,500 editorials during his tenure from 1982-1999. He expands *CC*'s scope to include perspective on other denominations and finally settles the long-running language question with a fully English paper by 1983. Marian Van Til introduces readers to a new team member on *CC*'s staff in 1985: the word processor, which saves "countless hours a month in writing, editing and typing." A reader describes *CC* at this time as a mandatory window into the current Christian Reformed life and witness in Canada. The paper slowly graduates in name and vision from *Calvinist Contact* to *Christian Courier*.

"The challenge of our time," Witvoet summarizes in 1985, "does not lie in whether we hold on to the historic Christian faith, but in whether we put it to work!"



Bert Witvoet, Stan De Jong and Marian Van Til in the *CC* office at Martindale Road, St. Catharines, in the early 1990s.

## CC enters a new millennium

### Bert Witvoet

After a brief editorship by Marian Van Til, Harry der Nederlanden takes over the editorial pen in 2000. Der Nederlanden is a prolific reader and writer, and manages to write profound and funny editorials as well as challenging articles that boost a vital Reformed witness. One of his most popular editorials, "From wooden shoes to cowboy boots," shows his love for the CRC's Dutch roots and its contemporary Canadian identity. Although assisted in the department of lay-out, mailing, subscriptions and advertising by his faithful wife, Rose, and an equally dedicated Ineke Medcalf, der Nederlanden is up against tremendous odds when it comes to filling the pages of *CC* with fresh Reformational content. The budget does not allow for more professional help; nevertheless, the editor manages to keep *CC* going by moving the office into his house. Harry's beloved voice is silenced by cancer in the fall of 2008.

Bert Witvoet comes out of retirement when Harry is too weak to maintain the paper, and he assumes the role of in-



Harry der Nederlanden

terim editor. The Board of Reformed Faith Witness, in the meantime, is faced with an agonizing decision: to continue with 2,500 subscribers or to fold. From the reading constituency comes a clear cry: "Don't give up! Keep *CC* going." The Board listens and takes strong action. It appoints three co-editors: Angela Reitsma Bick, Brett Alan Dewing and Bert Witvoet in January 2009. With the appointment of two youthful editors, Angela and Brett, the paper sees a great influx of other young writers. A renewed energy and sense of hope begins to emerge, and donations start to flow in to bolster the work. Subscription numbers also start to slowly climb up again.



Angela Reitsma Bick

this up-and-coming generation of Reformed Christians is up to the challenge of assuming its cultural responsibilities in the arena we call the Canadian Public Square.

Today, editor-in-chief Angela Reitsma Bick, features editor Cathy Smith, and numerous columnists, writers, and contributing editors carry on the work of responsible biblical journalism at a time when secular humanism sets the tone in public debate and discourse. Time will tell, and God already knows, whether

### CC as a seed of love

It's no secret that *CC* has at least four times as many readers as subscribers; the Dutch frugal gene seems to have been passed down through the generations as faithfully as dog-eared copies of the paper. "Oh, I read that at my mother-in-law's on Sundays." "Yah, I get it from my brother." "We pick it up at church."

But for every copy-sharing case, there's someone else quietly supporting *CC* by giving gift subscriptions to family and friends (or – if money is tight – sending names and addresses to [rose@christiancourier.ca](mailto:rose@christiancourier.ca) to begin free, trial subscriptions). For those

faithful readers, we are grateful.

One semi-retired farmer (name withheld by request) has been paying the renewal notices for ten different subscriptions for years. He says although he doesn't always agree with every article, he likes reading different points of view. He directs the gift subscriptions to members of his large family. It's a way of evangelizing, he says, and only God knows what might come from it. His own father had a good way of putting it, he recalls: "Plant the seed; combine is up to God."

—Ed.





## Features

**blog:** (n) short for weblog, a website containing an online journal with reflections, comments and links. *Christian Courier* gives you a glimpse into current Reformed thinking by presenting excerpts from some of today's top blogs. Blogs are usually free-association, occasional, off-the-cuff and may not conform to the standards of print publications.



In her blog, *Peripheral Vision* (<http://cathysmith001.wordpress.com>), Cathy writes on a variety of topics "to clarify for myself what I believe about the Christian faith." Her posts about gardening and backyard adven-

tures are down-to-earth and humorous. In *The Nose in My Bathroom Tile* (2009/11/08), Cathy summarizes her blogging efforts this way:

*So, here I am blogging. I want to write about the things I see. Mostly because they seem to be demanding my attention. Embedded designs. Anomalies and quirks in the fabric of my life. Something or someone behind the curtain that I have to check out, like Toto in the Wizard of Oz. I'm a Christian, so I am saying that it's God. In my peripheral vision, I see him working. Just oblique glimpses,*

*as if his back is turned towards me, so I just can't be certain always as to what he is doing. There's swirling smoke and haze. Sometimes he drifts out of sight entirely. It seems he's a smith (too), muscled and strong, sweating in a sooty shed, smiting and refining with powerful arms and skillful craft. Sparks fly, and metal clashes. He's trying to get my attention, I think, calling me to look again, to look more intently, to notice that he is here, busy.*

## Old and New

### Part 1 – What was I waiting for?

It's almost the new year, but my mind is still on Advent. Yesterday I heard about a pastor who chose not to sing any carols during the Christmas season. Maybe he thought gazing at baby Jesus in the manger would divert attention from the reason for his birth – our sin, and his destiny – the cross. The pastor's flock grumbled behind his back. They wanted to sing the old favourites!

Not that long ago, we didn't celebrate Advent in our church, either. No liturgy, no candles and certainly no Christmas tree. It made me wonder, What is Advent really? Syncretism sneaking in the back door? Collusion with the marketplace, boosting profits by piously prolonging a consumer Christmas?

Traditionally, Advent is that time of waiting for the arrival of the Infant King, waiting for him to bring those gifts of hope, peace, joy and love for which we light a candle on the four Sundays before Christmas. Well, waiting certainly resonates with me. I'm 54, and I've spent my whole life waiting. Waiting for things to be resolved, to be fixed, to be perfect, so I can finally be free of worry and be happy. Waiting for hope, peace, joy and love to win out over doubt, conflict, heartache, and sorrow.

As I teenager, I waited impatiently to get older. I wanted independence. My parents, as parents do, tried to protect me from my own headstrong impulsiveness. Not surprisingly, conflict ensued. I even left home for a while because I couldn't wait. My teen years were not really a happy time.

In my twenties I was waiting for my marriage to improve. My teaching career brought fulfillment, but marital bliss was elusive. It was a decade of questioning my choice and peering over the precipice. Would things ever get better?

In my thirties, I was still married with three children to boot. Then my dad was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma and suffered for the next ten years. Another decade of anxiety. More waiting ... for the pain meds to kick in, for the finances to be sorted out, and, in the end, even for death, as Dad lay in a coma for three days. It was an all-consuming fight against cancer. I was spent when it was over, and I was still waiting. Waiting for that perfect time when all of my loved ones would be healthy, spiritually mature and financially stable, and I could rest.

You guessed it. My forties did not deliver. I had teenagers now. It was payback time. They did everything I did to my parents and then some. And my mother-in-law passed away. My father-in-law. My brother-in-law. My sister went through a gut-wrenching divorce. Other nasty stuff happened. Good things, too, but never a time when anxiety didn't gnaw at me.

So here I am in my fifties, still waiting. Now I'm retired, and new worries lurk just around the corner. I see my mom aging. I'm dealing with all the emotions that crowd an empty nest. My husband has upcoming doctor's appointments. It's finally dawning on me, slow learner that I am, that the perfect coalescence of hope, peace, joy, and love that I am waiting for is never going to happen. It's not what the Infant King intended to bring me, anyway.

Turns out that Advent is not about waiting, after all. John the Baptist, Advent-in-the-flesh, preached about preparing and repenting, not about waiting. About changing old habits. He advised the man with two tunics to give one away. He told the tax collector to collect only what was due and the soldier to be content with his pay and not extort money or accuse people falsely. Like Isaiah who urged, "Arise, shine, for your light has come and the glory of the Lord rises upon you," John preached about being a witness to the coming light.

I hear him preaching to me: "Get off your duff, already. Get ready to receive Christ. Change your sackcloth for something brighter, for heaven's sake! Repent, get busy doing good, be a witness to what's coming."

John reminds me that Advent is but prologue to what really matters – that Jesus has come. He's here. The Word Made Flesh. Jesus himself is the Incarnation of the gifts I've been waiting for. He reaches out his little nail-destined hand from the manger to anoint me to do the same. Incarnate his presence. Enflesh my words with hope. Offer peace to the embattled. Drink from the cup of joy and pass it on. Embody love in my actions. The gifts I've been waiting to receive are, in fact, the gifts I'm meant to give. There is nothing

passive about Advent. I have to be a voice calling out in the desert, even in the dry places of my own life: "Alleluia, he is coming! Alleluia, he is here!"

### Part 2 – Travelling On

I went for a walk a few days ago. The sky was grey, heavy with snow. I was still thinking about Advent, charged up with the idea about "not waiting" any longer for hope, peace, joy, and love. These gifts are already mine in Christ. Is it possible to believe that more intentionally... minute by minute, hour by hour, day by day?

My artist friend Hank Jagt has a painting called *Bridge in Kent County*. Two roads, bordered by ditches, cross at a bridge and roll on into the distance. The canvas captures the serenity of the countryside, but I see something more. I see a huge cross branded on the landscape itself, carved out of water, crunchy gravel, and rural roads. It's a metaphor of the faith I want to carry me into the future, the sacrifice of Jesus sculpted in relief on me, his living stone.

The wind was fresh and cold against my face. I was thankful for my warm Columbia coat! My special needs buddy, Ron, passed me. I meet up with him just about every day. He attends Friendship Program at our church. I smiled at him and said hello. He nodded as he shuffled by, embarrassed but pleased to be acknowledged.

I noticed flashing lights up ahead. The RIDE program. The OPP were checking cars for impaired drivers. I felt grateful to live in a safe country like Canada and said a little prayer for nations mired in warfare and poverty. And I said another little prayer for the oppressed, who can't trust their own police.

Then I had my daily visit with Tolkien. Not literally, of course, but I can't help but think of him and chuckle every time I pass two trees with "faces." My Entish friends remind me of how much I love *Lord of the Rings*. On this particular day, thinking about Advent, I recalled one of my favourite Tolkien quotes about joy. I looked it up when I got home: "Fairytale does not deny the existence of sorrow and failure: the possibility of these is necessary to the joy of the deliverance; it denies (in the face of much evidence, if you will) universal final defeat ... giving a fleeting glimpse of Joy. Joy, beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief." Tolkien's words made me think about the Second Coming. Doubt, conflict, heartache, and sorrow will not win. Someday they will be defeated by Joy. It occurs to me now that Advent is not just a Christmas word. We live in Advent every day until the last day when our Saviour will return in triumph.

The highlight of my walk was when I passed a garishly decorated Victorian home on the main street. There's a Santa by the front door, guarded by two regal lions. There's a Narnian lamp-post and an Italianate fountain. In the midst of this ragtag conglomeration of garden decor stands a life-sized nativity scene cut out of plywood and propped up against the wall. Joseph and Mary and baby Jesus look decidedly cartoonish, but you can't miss them.

For me this comic scene encompasses something gut-wrenchingly true about how we share the Christmas story. We don't always "go and tell" our miraculous glad tidings with sensitivity and loveliness. We clutter up the landscape of our lives, haphazardly stuffing the good news right in there beside the ugly and the petty. Most of the time, we're like those dirty shepherds with a glorious story to tell that few will believe because of their disreputable appearance. Most of the time, that's what I'm like, anyway. My sin and shortcomings obscure the imprint of the cross on my life. Thankfully, despite those slovenly shepherds, and despite me, the divinely-propelled good news hurls itself through history trailing a cone of blessing.

On the way home, a strong line of demarcation split the sky. Above the charcoal-coloured clouds was a bright blue canopy. I turned into my own street and saw a shiny circle on the horizon across the fields. I knew it was just the sun's rays glinting off the dome of a silo in the distance, but my imagination slipped its traces. Here was my very own eastern star rising in the sombre sky. Look around, I told myself. This is an illumined place. Christ is here.

I'd been on a journey. Love, peace, joy and hope were all there on the road with me. Now I only had to be wise enough to see it, pack it in my camel bag, and take it with me into the new year.



## Columns

## From the 11th Province

Marian Van Til

In memory of my father, William Van Til (d. Jan. 26, 1973), who taught his children what is necessary to "gain a heart of wisdom."

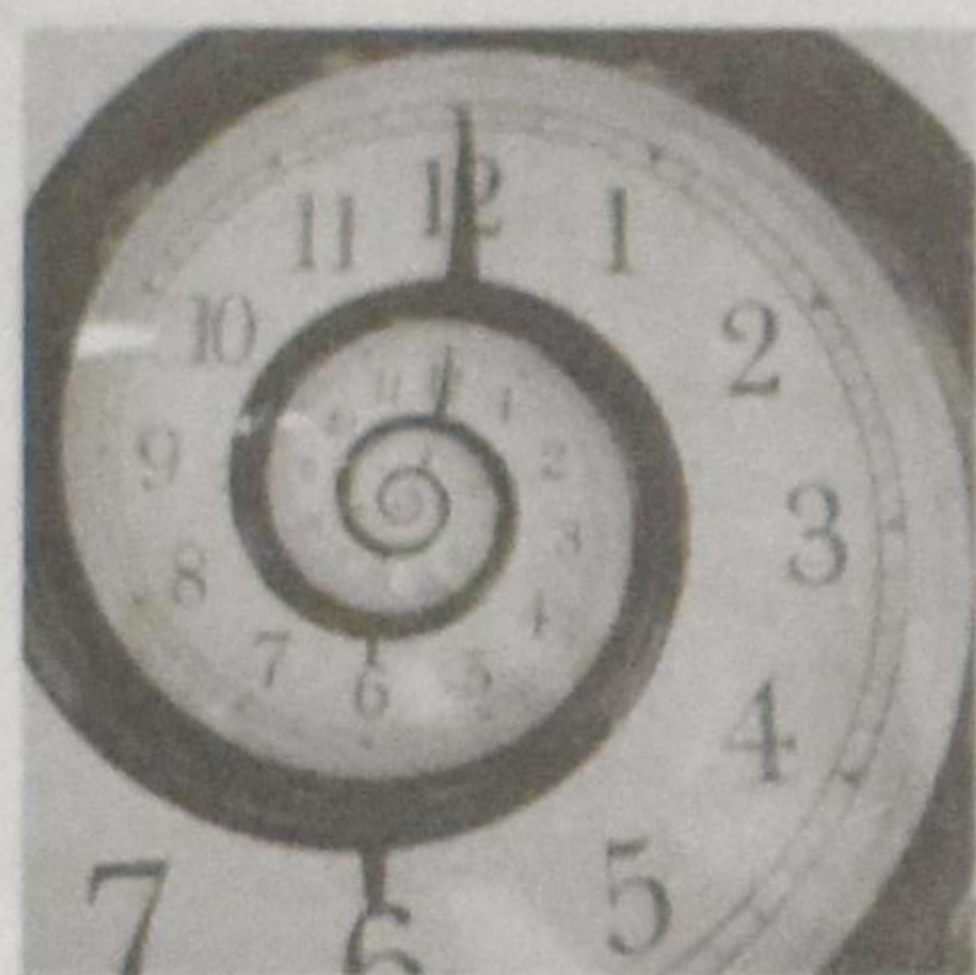
We are five days away from the Year of Our Lord 2011. If we are suffering, grieving, in pain or fearing bad news, a work-week can seem an eternity. Yet in God's cosmic scheme, five days is an instant, and even the normal span of our lives (or the 65-year-history of this paper) quickly passes.

So it is a good and profitable exercise to annually contemplate the passing of years. In the Christian Reformed Church I grew up in one did not revel away the Old Year and greet the New bleary-eyed or foggy-brained. We ended every year in church and began every year in church. It has been a long time since I've gone to a church that holds Old Year's and New Year's services. In my earlier life I didn't always appreciate them, but their demise from most churches is a serious loss, I've come to think.

## Far more than marking time

We earth- and body-bound creatures need to mark life's important events. The obvious time-marking occasions are birthdays and anniversaries (of marriages, of newspapers, of many human events). But we must do

more than mark such times as the secular world does. As the old hymn says, when "another year is dawning" may we implore God that it might be "another year with Thee."



Our year's-end/year's beginning "reveling" should signify something beyond the fun of watching the crystal ball drop in Times Square or singing "Auld Lang Syne" to rock accompaniment at the base of Niagara

Falls. Our Reformed reveling should celebrate, in the best sense of that much-over-used word, God's gracious gift of another year, his vast blessings in the year past, his ever-present help in trouble, his strong arm and healing touch; indeed, his very being. That the one true God who "from everlasting to everlasting is God" should also be our intimately loving, compassionate Father-Redeemer is the real miracle.

*LORD, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations. Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.* That's the opening of Psalm 90, a psalm often associated with the passing of one year and the greeting of the next. It is that psalm that my husband

and I read together near midnight every year on New Year's Eve. I trust all of us work out ways to invite God to our years' end parties.

The New International Study Bible (Archaeological Edition) says Psalm 90 is a lament. The majority of the Psalms are laments but I had not mentally put Psalm 90 in that category. Laments, we're told, "express the anguish of worshipers due to sin, famine, enemies, etc. In these psalms a petitioner pleads with God to remove the source of his distress, often accompanied by a vow to praise God. Psalms of lament may be sung by the individual or an entire congregation." Or where two or three are gathered in his name.

## Gaining a heart of wisdom

When Psalm 90 is looked at closer its communal-lament character becomes clear. It starts by asserting that God is our refuge. That's our basis on which to appeal to him for mercy. We then lament our mortality and sinfulness: we – clever, sophisticated, Crown of Creation – are but dust, not much more enduring than blades of grass. God, for whom a thousand years "are like a day that has just gone by," simply sweeps us away into death and we return to the earth from whence we came.

But there's more. We next confess, "We are consumed by your anger . . . You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins

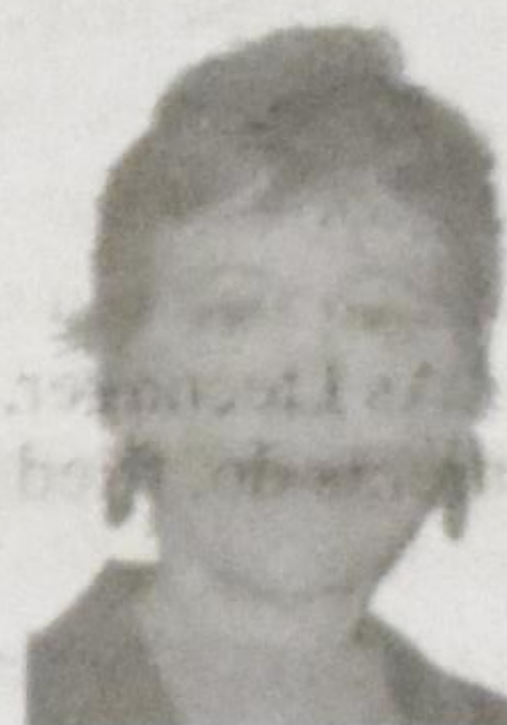
in the light of your presence . . ." Maybe it's a blessing in disguise that "the length of our days is 70 years – or 80, if we have strength" because the span of those few years is but trouble and sorrow.

How can we escape that miserable plight? The psalm clues us in: first, we pray that we will "number our days aright" so that "we may gain a heart of wisdom." That's what this marking of the years is about in the first place: it makes us aware, day by day by year by year, how we are living: for Whom, and for what purpose. And it allows – forces – us to make course corrections as necessary.

Once we do that we're on God's side: his friends, people after his own heart. And we can boldly plead, *Relent, O LORD! . . . Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days. Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, for as many years as we have seen trouble.* And, oh LORD, one more thing: about the task you have for each of us to do, this year and every year until "we fly away"? *Establish the work of our hands for us – yes, establish the work of our hands.*

Amen.

Marian Van Til (mvan-til@roadrunner.com) is a former CC editor living in Youngstown, NY.



Flowers & Thistles  
Curt Gesch

## You say salaam, I say shalom

We ordered a cab to take us from a hotel to Richmond, B.C., to get to the Vancouver Airport. Our cabbie opened the door for us, took our luggage

to the trunk, and asked our destination.

There wasn't much doubt that the middle-aged cabbie was not of northern European origin. I was trying to think of a way to ask him his country of origin without awkwardness or implied racism. At a stop sign he talked briefly into a cell phone. He was not speaking either of Canada's official languages, nor German, Dutch, French, Spanish, or Czech, or anything I recognized, either.

Clever me. I asked, "How many languages do you speak?"

"Only two – Farsi and English."

"Were you born in Iran?" I asked. And he told us his story.

"My wife and I were born in Iran. Both of us were engineers. Of course, with different accreditation standards, we are not engineers in Canada. But we chose to get out of Iran. We are of the Bahá'í faith. It was very difficult for us in Iran. We experienced difficulty getting into university



there. My uncle, a professor in a medical school, lost his job because he was of the Bahá'í faith. He was imprisoned and . . . well . . . executed.

"So we went to Turkey and waited several years before we could get into Canada. We are not engineers here, but our children do very well in school. Two of them have scholarships to the University of British Columbia and the third does very well in high school, too. We are not engineers here but we love being in Canada."

As we left the cab I said, "I know how to wish you peace in Hebrew – shalom. And in Arabic – salaam. But I don't know how to speak Farsi."

"Oh," he replied, "we would say

”ظفاح ادخ“

"God bless you, too," we both replied in English, and "thanks for the ride."

\*\*\*\*\*

In worship that next Sunday we were asked to pray for the persecuted church. I couldn't help thinking of our cabbie,

from what is sometimes called a syncretic or eclectic religion. Or a universalist religion. Or a blasphemy.

To that cabbie and all the others in this world who are persecuted for their faith or "otherness," I say,

Shalom, Salaam, and ظفاح ادخ in 2011.

Curt Gesch (curt-gesch@hotmail.com) is a writer and farmer from Quick, B.C. ظفاح ادخ can be transliterated as

"khodah hafez," and pronounced as "kho-daw haw-fiz."



## What Bahá'is believe

All humanity is one family.  
Women and men are equal.  
All prejudice – racial, religious, national, or economic – is destructive and must be overcome.  
We must investigate truth for ourselves, without preconceptions.  
Science and religion are in harmony.  
Our economic problems are linked to spiritual problems.  
The family and its unity are very important.  
There is one God.  
All major religions come from God.  
World peace is the crying need of our time.

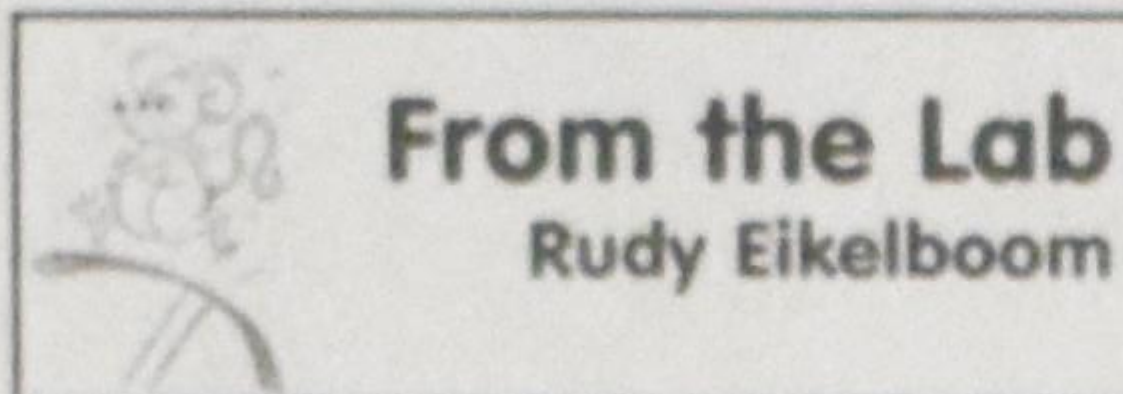
## Bahá'is and persecution

The earliest followers of Bahá'u'lláh met brutal opposition incited by the clergy and were killed in the thousands. Today, the Bahá'í faith still suffers severe repression in Iran, the land of its birth, and in several other Muslim countries. The 300,000 Bahá'is in Iran constitute its largest religious minority, and in recent years many have been killed, imprisoned, and deprived of employment and education solely because of their religious beliefs. Bahá'is have also been persecuted under fascist and communist regimes.

– adapted from Bahai.org



## Columns



**From the Lab**  
Rudy Eikelboom

## Sixty-five years of Science

This year we celebrate the 65th year of *Christian Courier*, a small gift of our Lord to our community. I find it interesting to look at what has changed in science in those 65 years. Last month I attended the 41st annual meeting of the Society for Neuroscience, the largest purely scientific meeting in the world with over 31,000 people attending. This society is 19 years younger than CC. It was a wonderful gathering that showed how far we have come in understanding the brain and how little we really know.

The general scientific community has discovered much in the last 65 years. We can now look inside a working brain and measure its activity in real time using fMRI (functional magnetic resonance imaging), giving us a potential window into the mystery of consciousness. We have sequenced the human DNA and that of many other species, meaning we can explore what makes humans unique from other creatures. The Large Hadron Collider at CERN (the European Organization for Nuclear Research) in Geneva is starting to look at very heavy nuclear particles, which may ultimately give us a way to unite the laws of physics. The Hubble space telescope has provided amazingly beautiful pictures of God's creation.

Scientific progress has clearly sparked a technological revolution. When I started as a graduate student in the early 1970s, Concordia's very advanced computer (a CDC

64000) filled a large part of the ninth floor of the Hall building, yet now I am writing this column on a netbook computer that is easier to use, better connected to the World Wide Web and arguably more powerful than that machine. I can access a database in Wikipedia that contains many times more facts than the Encyclopaedia Britannica that I painfully bought in 24 monthly payments as a high school student in the 1960s. Our sexual behaviour has been revolutionized by a little pill that has decoupled sex and parenthood. Smallpox is history and polio may be history soon, but AIDS is a new disease that haunts millions. We have walked on the moon.

### Through a glass darkly?

In 2005 the scientific journal *Science* celebrated its 125th anniversary (making it only about twice as old as CC) by asking, what do we not yet know? They posed 125 hard science questions to which we had yet no answer, including, among others, "What is consciousness?" "Why are humans so different from other animals?" "Are we alone in the universe?" and "Can the laws of physics be unified?" I suspect that in another 125 years, some of these questions will be answered, but it will still be possible to ask over 250 hard science questions for which



The Hubble Space Telescope captured this "galaxy triplet" in 2009.

we have no answers.

Yet despite the progress of science in the last 65 years, our basic situation as reflected in Scripture has not changed. We still live in a creation broken by sin. While the brokenness caused by sin in my life and in the lives of those around me is clearly evident, I am not clear on how far to extend the consequences and reality of sin into the greater creation. God's words to Adam after the fall suggest that the whole creation is accursed. Regardless of how far the consequences of sin have spread, it is a reality in our lives. We need the gift that the Gospel reveals,

the birth we celebrate this month and ultimately the death of the Son of God to bring us back into unity with our Creator.

It is not clear to me how the fall and the sin that has entered our lives changes how we see God's creation. I see it as a provision of common grace that the science I do – along with many others – gives us a better and more accurate understanding of God's world, but I do not know if I am looking through a mirror darkly; discerning the laws used by God to build His world is possible

only through the sweat of my brow. Will science be easier after Christ returns? I don't know. I am sure, however, that even if God gives us another 65 years of CC, there will be more science to discover and talk about. Thank you to all those whose gifts and work have made this paper possible. ➤

Rudy Eikelboom (reikelboom@wlu.ca) is Professor and Chair of Psychology at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario.



## Getting Unstuck

Arlene Van Hove

I feel honored to have the opportunity of writing in the 65th anniversary issue of *Christian Courier*. First, I would like to thank my mother for faithfully subscribing to CC for over fifty years. Because the paper was easily accessible (on the side sofa table), I am one of their columnists today. Second, I would like to thank the board and staff of CC for putting up with my feverish scribbles usually submitted at the last minute. Third, I want to thank Rose for supporting our former editor and her spouse, Harry der Nederlanden, who is sadly no longer with us, as he kept the paper going under very challenging circumstances. His humor was infectious and his counsel was wise.

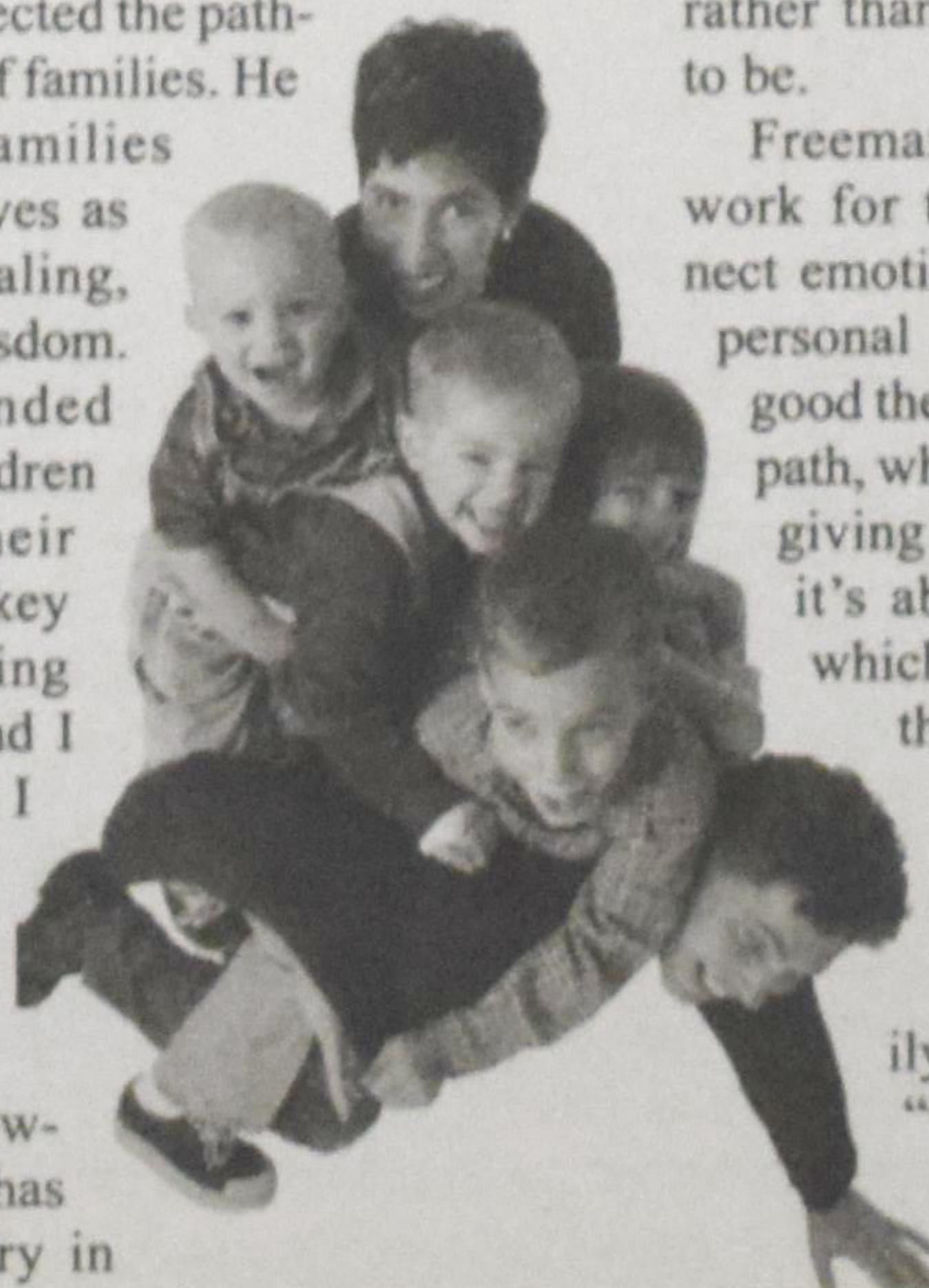
For my last column of the year I thought I would step away from the regular questions and response format and pass along a way of looking at families I have found helpful.

### A mentor with a fresh perspective

Wise elders or mentors can play a huge role in our professional or personal lives by offering a fresh perspective on issues of concern. David Freeman became my mentor, especially during my days as a student therapist. He was only slightly older than I was. Unfortunately, he died on September 13, 2010, at the age of 67, from heart failure

in Croatia. He was on a biking trip he had wanted to make for a long time. Freeman was a professor at the University of British Columbia's School of Social Work, as well as a practicing family therapist. He retired from his academic position in 2003 but continued to practice in Vancouver. He was also a prolific author and his most honored academic work was *Multigenerational Family Therapy*.

Freeman rejected the pathological view of families. He encouraged families to see themselves as vessels for healing, growth and wisdom. He recommended that adult children understand their parents as the key to understanding themselves. And I agree. The day I stopped seeing my mother as 'only' my mother but rather as a growing adult who has her own history in



terms of hopes, dreams and sorrows was the day I accepted her as her own person. She no longer had to live up to my or anyone else's expectations.

Freeman also believed a person's character was most visible during conflict rather than good times. He found that during conflict, family bonds were created through members' willingness to understand, accept and respect one another for who they are, rather than what the others needed them to be.

Freeman used the family as a framework for therapists to help people connect emotionally with others despite their personal anxieties. He strongly believed good therapy helps couples find a middle path, which is not about accommodating, giving up, or compromising. Instead, it's about finding creative solutions which come from the head as well as the heart.

### If all else fails, focus on your own response

Unfortunately, some family members are not willing to be "vessels for healing, growth and wisdom." They may have no desire to understand one another.

We can quickly lose heart when we want to resolve issues among family. But even in challenging circumstances, learning from family conflicts can be helpful. It's also an opportunity to learn about ourselves.

My first suggestion is to stay out of the blame game. Focusing on what others do wrong does not get us anywhere, especially if the others do not wish to deal with conflict. In the end, we can only decide for ourselves how to respond, allowing us to move forward regardless of what everyone else does. My second suggestion is to stay connected to family members even though it may only be a superficial relationship. Cutting off from one's family of origin rarely pays healthy dividends (this suggestion is not necessarily application in cases of sexual abuse, however).

And so, as we are heading into a new year, let us all put our hope and trust in our Creator and allow him to use us to become vessels for healing and growing. And just maybe the soul we nourish will be our own. ➤

Arlene Van Hove (avanhove@shaw.ca) is a therapist and a member of the Fleetwood CRC.



## Families: not dysfunctional, but places of healing and growing



## Columns

## Co-owning the Earth **Falling on deaf ears:** Bert Hielema **Christians and climate change**

I am a very emotional man. When I discovered that some Canadian Christians, working in institutions which I once served on various levels, openly ridicule climate change and deny the findings of thousands of serious scientists, I was deeply upset.

Here is some undeniable stuff. 2010 is on track to be the earth's hottest year on record, and here's the math: 98 climate scientists out of 100 tell me that our constant carbon emissions means disruptive climate change this century. Two out of 100 call this nonsense. Fundamental Christians tell me to bet on the two.

Suppose society combats climate change anyway, seeing it as the sensible thing to do. This means that we'll have slightly higher energy prices but cleaner air; we'll have less sickness but more renewable energy; the Saudis will have less money but we'll have more innovative industries. If the deniers are wrong and we do nothing, our kids – many in Christian Schools – will meet the sudden stop at the end. In that case, the lie has won, at least until the Lord comes back.

There's a Dutch saying which translates like this: "even though the Lie is fast, competing with Truth it'll come in last." Mark Twain a century ago said something similar: "A lie can travel halfway around the world while the truth is putting on its shoes."

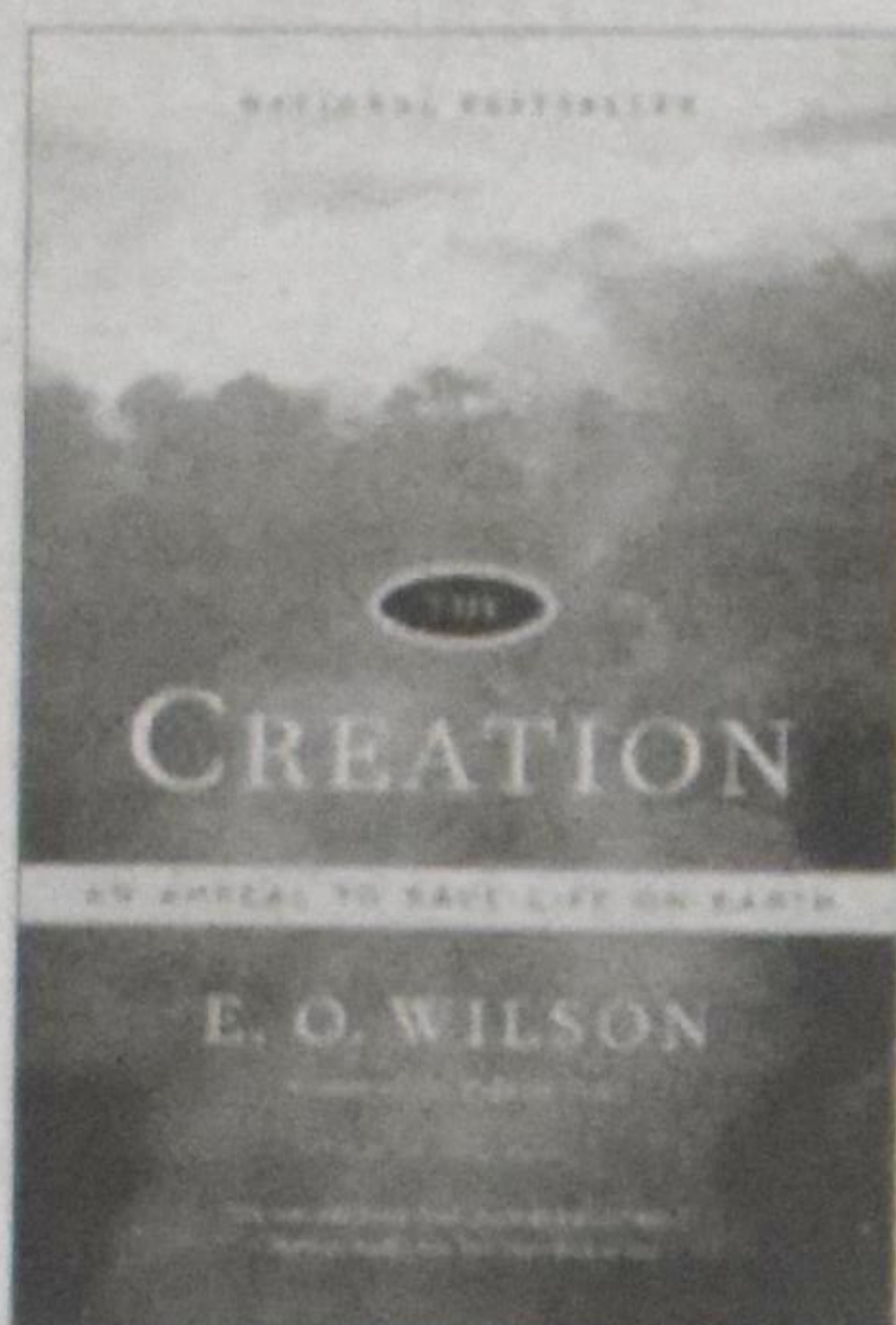
By the time you read this, the United Nations conference on Climate Change held in Cancun, Mexico, will be over. Expectations for a new pact to replace Kyoto are very low. Part of that is Canada's position. Just before the meetings began, environmentalists rated the participating nations on their efforts to fight this man-made condition. Out of the 57 nations, Canada came in almost last: number 54. This is the influence of Prime Minister Stephen Harper, and his most important voting bloc – the Province of Alberta and its tar-sands.

### Making alliances

But the conditions as portrayed in Romans 8 ("creation has been groaning as in childbirth") are still evident. Revelation 16 reveals that "the sun was allowed to scorch the people with fire. They were seared by the intense heat." So why is it that sincere Christians label climate change a "politically correct ploy" and dismiss it as a fiction?

Ninety percent of the large fish in the oceans are gone; in parts of the oceans there's six to ten times as much plastic as phytoplankton; there's dioxin in every mother's breast milk; and current rates of extinction are a thousand times faster than the natural rate.

I know, I know. I hammered on this before. The key is awareness precisely because we



Biologist E.O. Wilson wants evolutionists and Christians to come together and save the earth.

are talking about God's creation – the reason why every Christian, each in his or her small way, should be in the forefront of the fight against climate change.

That is also the opinion of E.O. Wilson, the man whom *Time* magazine calls one of the world's great naturalists. In his national bestseller, *The Creation*, Dr Wilson appeals to a Southern Baptist pastor for counsel and help, and suggests that they set aside their differences to save Creation – living Nature – which is in deep trouble.

As an evolutionary biologist, he expresses his puzzlement over why so many religious leaders have hesitated to make protection of the Creation an important part of their teaching. He knows the Southern Baptist "rapture" bias, and debunks it as blasphemy, calling that concept not "gospels of hope and compassion, not born of the heart of Christianity, but gospels of cruelty and despair. Pastor, tell me I am wrong! [...] At the very least, Pastor, I expect we agree that somehow and somewhere back in history humanity lost its way. [...] We destroyed most of [creation] in order to improve our lives and generate more people."

He writes that the natural world is embedded in our genes: a view of natural environments leads to a decline in moods of fear and anger and generates an overall feeling of tranquility; for example, post-surgical patients looking out at trees recover more quickly and report less need for pain and anxiety medication than those who only see walls of buildings. No wonder: although Wilson wouldn't put it this way, creation has God's name written all over it.

Looking for a New Year's resolution? Start a book club and make this easily read book – only \$10 – your first topic of discussion.



Bert Hielema's book club is this month discussing Douglas Coupland's *Player One*: what is to become of us, the latest in the CBC Massey Lectures. In it, Coupland describes an airport bar when suddenly oil trades at \$350

per barrel, about four times the current rate: chaos ensues. You can download the Massey Lectures from iTunes. Hielema will reflect on this book in his next column. Bert can be reached at [hielema@allstream.net](mailto:hielema@allstream.net).

## At year's turning

Father, your Son did not stay in Bethlehem, and neither can we.

Of course, we'd rather linger in the fields near David's city waiting for more angel choirs, and dazzling stars to chase the dark and silence from our souls, here in the land where death's shadow casts its pall. We'd rather hunker near the place where the family from Nazareth received the homage of burley shepherds and travel-weary kings, and bask with all who long for rest in the presence of this Prince of Peace.

But you had other plans.

Your will took him to Jerusalem, and, if we're serious about Christmas, we need to follow him.

Follow him, with the heavenly strains of the "Gloria" ringing in our ears, till we reach the Via Dolorosa, where groans and curses fill the air.

The journey is not an easy one, we know;

and we hesitate as we take down the Christmas tree.

But the Master's words come to us surely as they did to Peter, James, and John: Come, follow me.

Follow me through the tempter's wilderness

till angels take the devil's place and give you what you truly need.

Follow me among the crowds who hunger for daily bread

and feed them with the basketsful of those who share,

but who hunger also for the nourishment of good news,

and tell them that they are blessed when they are meek

and merciful, when they make peace and do what's pure,

when they show love to those who hate

and forgive when they've been sinned against,

for of such is the kingdom of heaven.

Follow me when I heal the sick and resurrect the dead

through the power that the Father gives, and learn

that neither sickness nor death separates us from the Father's love.

Follow me when I flee the crowds and find a solitary place

where I can meet the Father, sometimes in transfiguring

glory on a mountain top, sometimes under the silent stars of a Judean night,

wrestling through blood and tears with my Father's will.

Follow me to Jerusalem, where only faith and love can follow,

and truth and grace meet in a broken body on the bloody cross.

Father, that's our prayer at the dawn of this new year:

to walk where Jesus walked, in faith that knows no fear.

Henry J. Baron

Reprinted with permission from *Talking with God*, p.238

**TALKING WITH GOD**

PRAYERS, MEDITATIONS  
& CONVERSATIONS FOR  
GOD-SEEKERS

BY  
**HENRY J. BARON**

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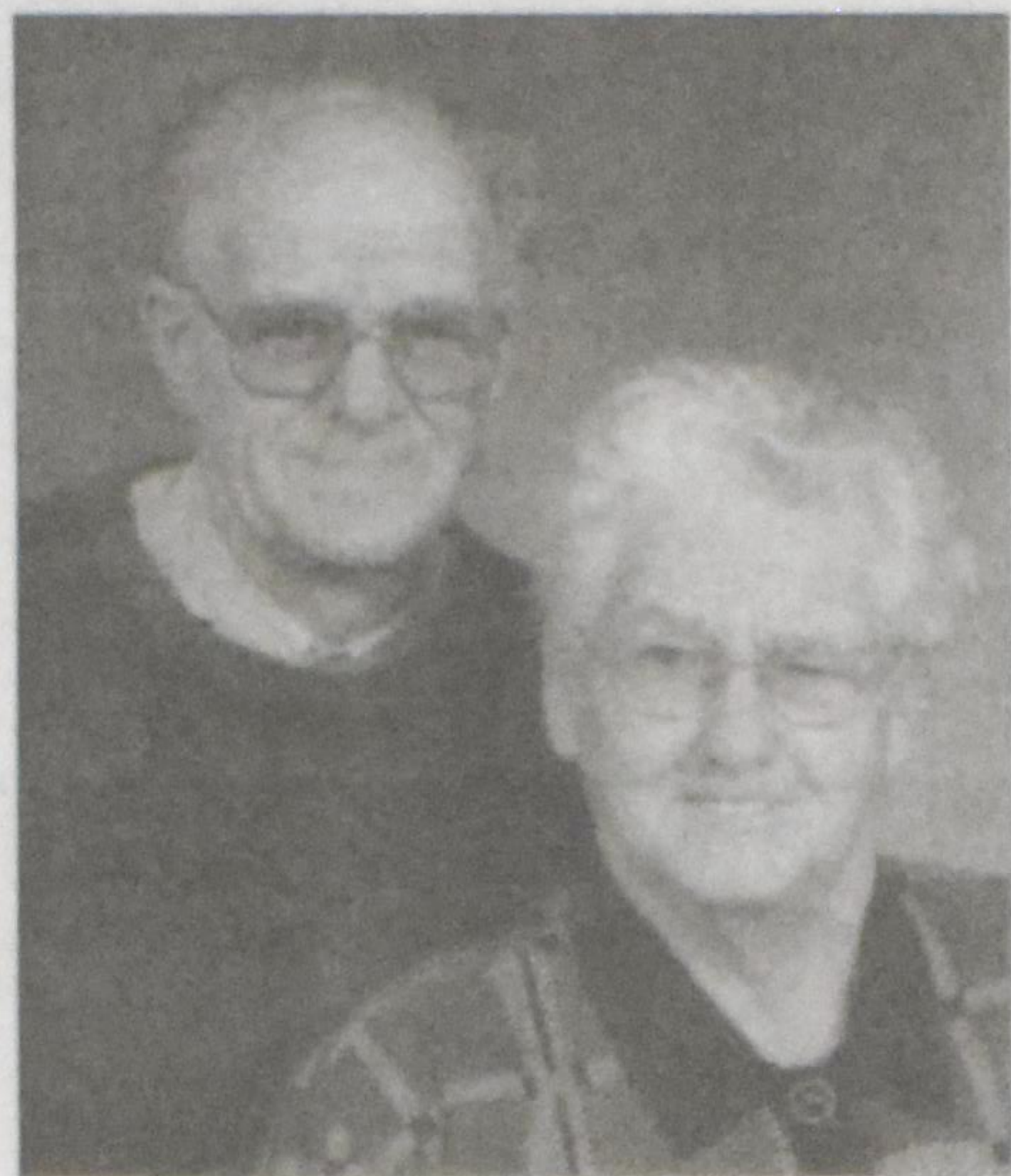
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## Obituary



**HENRY JOHN PRENGER**

January 8, 1930 - November 27, 2010

Psalm 100:5

*The Lord is good and his love endures forever;  
His faithfulness continues through all generations.*

Henry John Prenger of Thunder Bay, Ontario passed away peacefully with his family at his side on November 27, 2010. Henry was a member of Hope Christian Reformed Church and his dedication to God was the foundation of his life.

Henry will be sadly missed by his wife Tina, six children: Harry (Clara) Prenger, Tracy (Gary) Moskalyk, Janice (Ernie) Senf, Marlene (Don) Cronk, Tony (Donna) Prenger, and Christa Prenger (Randy Salamon), 15 grandchildren, 7 great-grandchildren, and numerous other relatives.

Condolences may be sent to Tina Prenger at  
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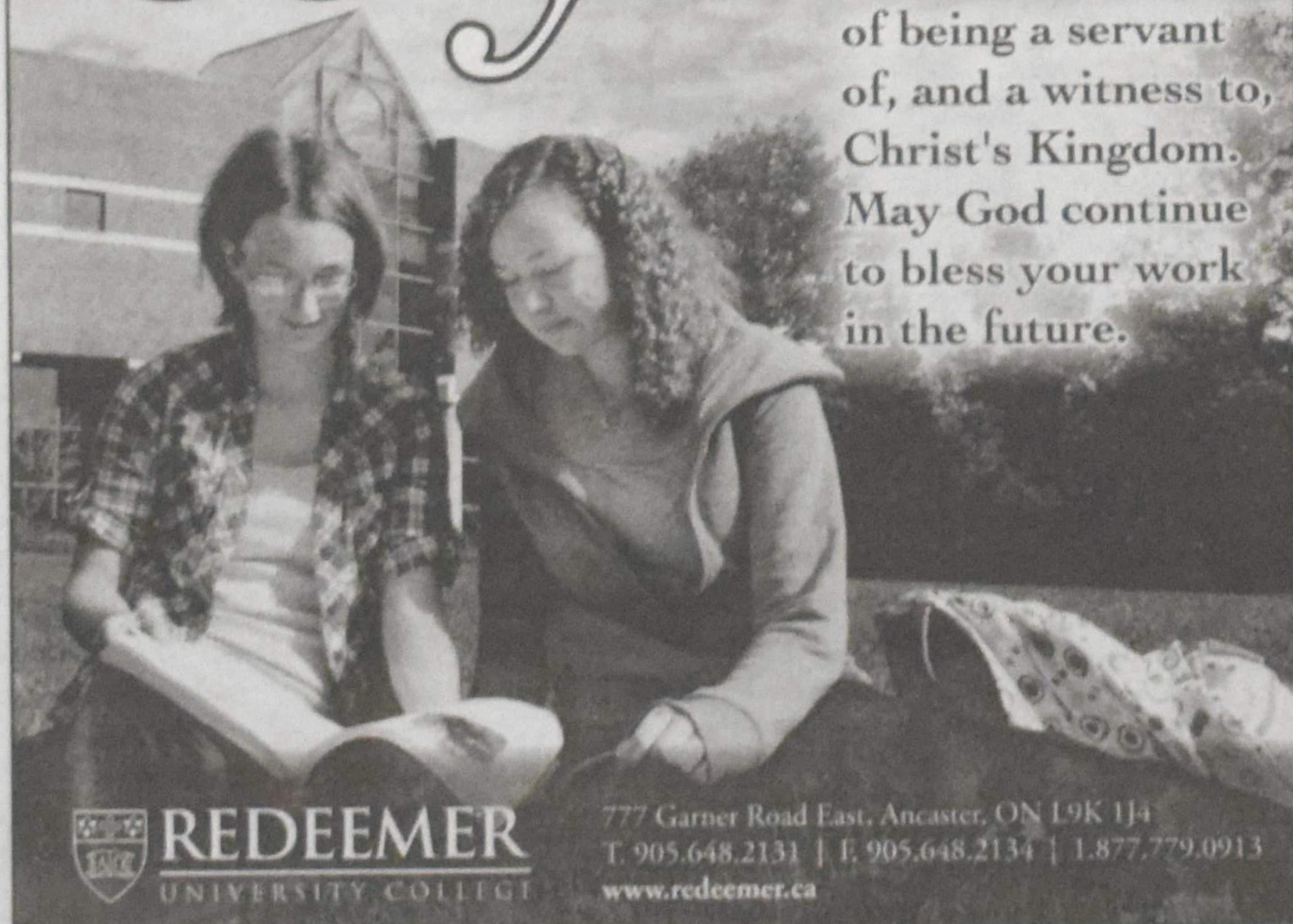
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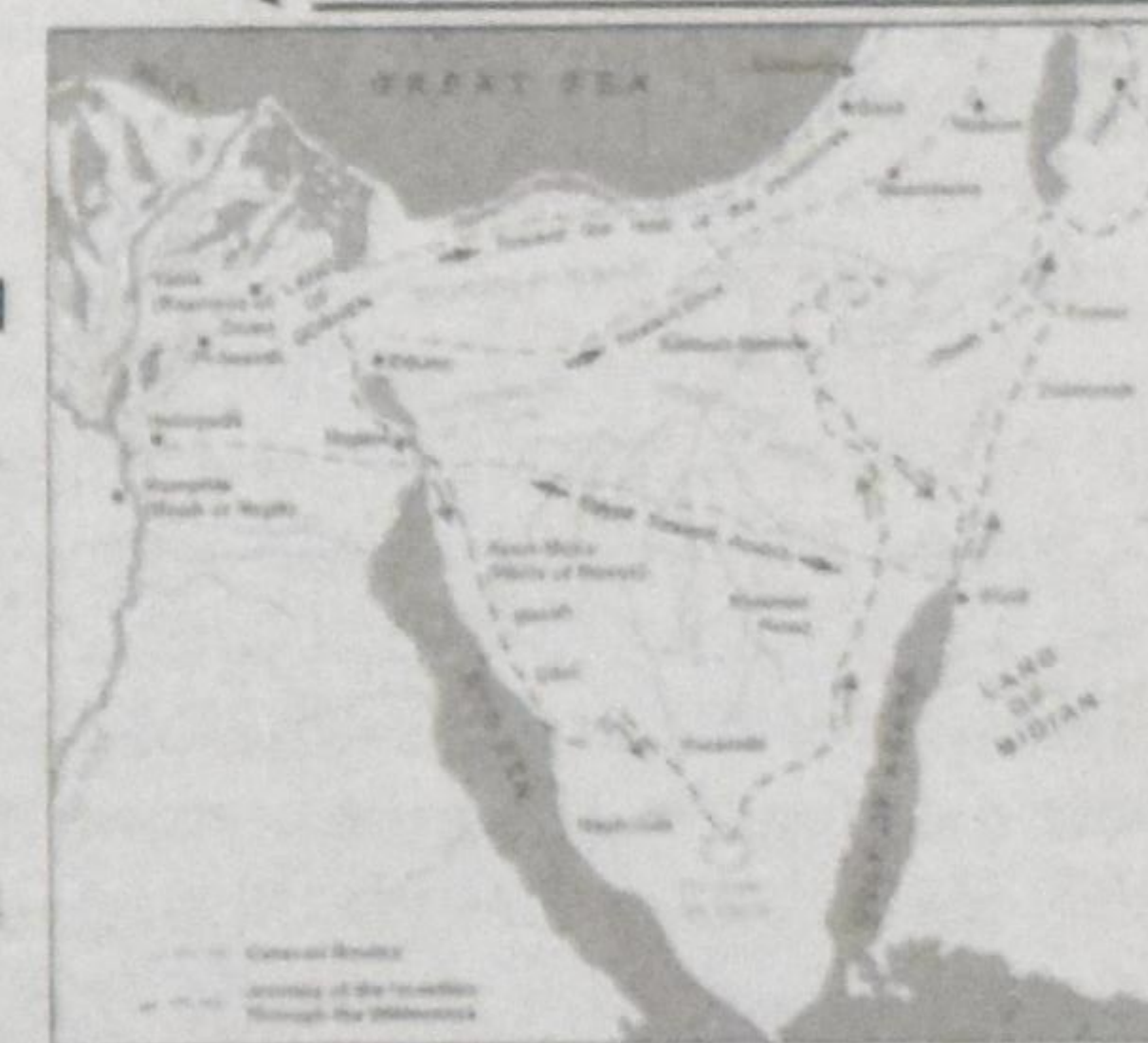
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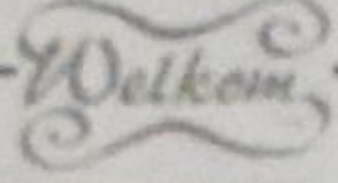
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The Director of Care is responsible and accountable to the CEO for the administration, organization and management of the Nursing Department.

## Qualifications Required:

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- Bachelor of Science Nursing degree (BSN) preferred and current registration with the College of Nurses of Ontario as a Registered Nurse.
- Demonstrated team player with outstanding interpersonal skills.
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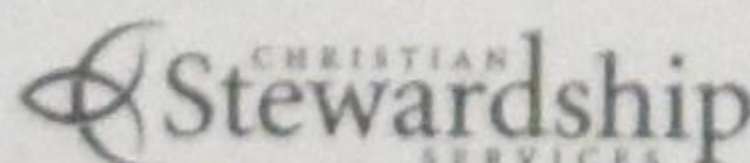
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## A FESTSCHRIFT FOR THEO PLANTINGA

FRIDAY, JANUARY 21, 2011

7:00pm - 10:30pm



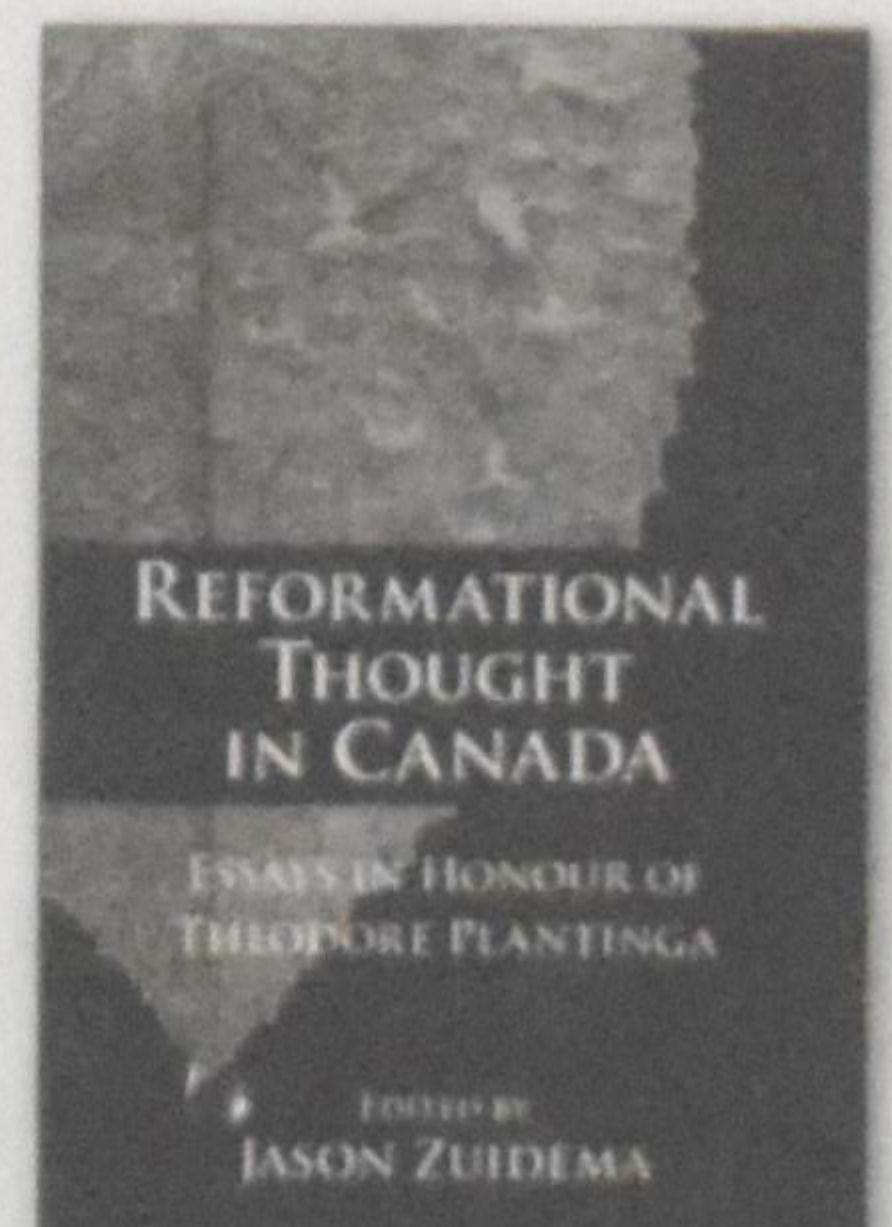
One of Redeemer's original faculty members, Dr. Theo Plantinga taught philosophy for a quarter of a century until his death in 2008. Redeemer is pleased to commemorate and celebrate Dr. Plantinga's life, as well as his academic and professional accomplishments, on January 21.

The great influence he had on so many through his teaching and writing will also be recognized in a book of essays called *Reformational Thought In Canada: Essays In Honour of Theodore Plantinga*. The book, authored by colleagues, friends and former students, and edited by one of his students, Dr. Jason Zuidema, will be formally launched that evening.

There is no charge for the event, and everyone is warmly welcome to the celebration. For more information, please contact Marlene Raddatz at 905.648.2139 x4414 or by email at [mraddatz@redeemer.ca](mailto:mraddatz@redeemer.ca).



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p.m. Rev. John Klomps will be  
preaching.

**Feb 18-20** Marriage Encounter  
weekend. **St. Catharines,**  
**Ont.** Register at [www.reformedme.org](http://www.reformedme.org)

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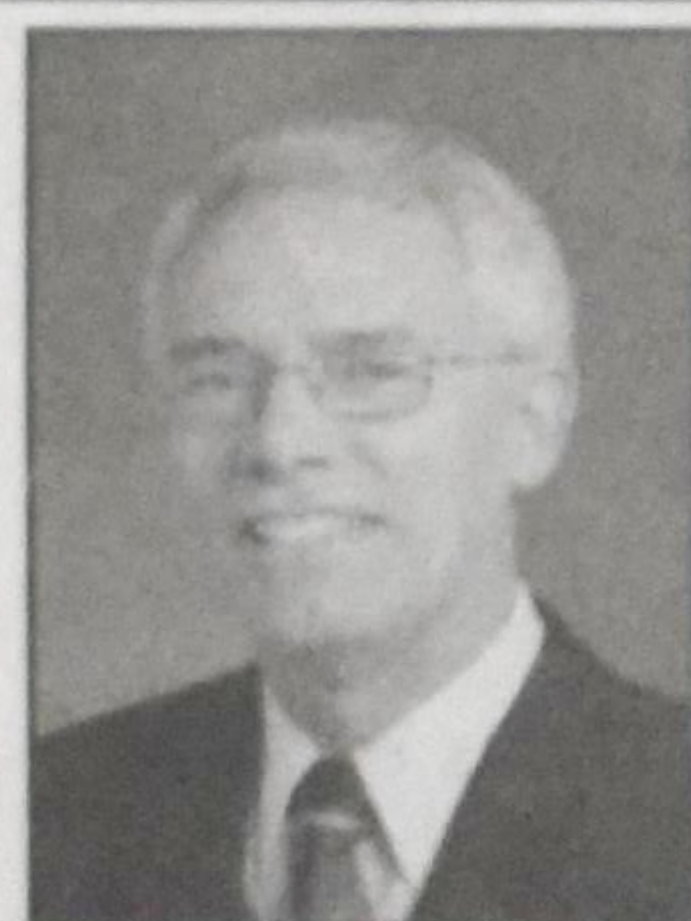
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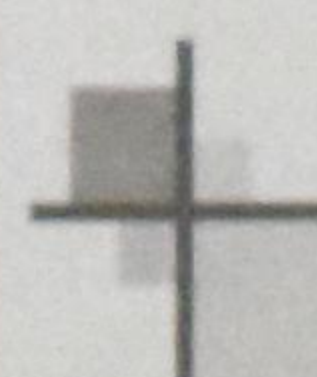


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## Events/News

## Dutch synod tries to heal centuries-old Protestant splits

Andreas Havinga

UTRECHT, Netherlands (ENI) — A gathering to improve relations between the many Protestant denominations in the Netherlands has taken place on the site of an earlier historic synod, though any idea of complete church unity taking place is said to be “an unrealistic utopia.” About 700 Christians from 50 Protestant churches attended what was billed as a “national synod” on 10 and 11 December in the main church in the town of Dordrecht.

The gathering's name echoed that of the Synod of Dordt, a six-month-long historic assembly held in the same building from November 1618 to May 1619, and called to settle a dispute between Calvinists



Baptist Teun van der Leer spoke on the need for unity.

and Arminians. Calvinists believe that God preordains only some people for salvation; Arminians say that all can be saved.

Calvinism won the day at the 17th-century Dordt synod, and has held sway in the Netherlands ever since. Still, its history has been marked by disputes that have resulted in distinct, rival Reformed denominations in The Netherlands. Today, Protestant Christians, mainly Calvinist, make up about one-third of the country's 16.3 million population.

“Our society can rely on us to be people who seek to go on their way in faith, hope and love,” the latest synod said in a state-

ment presented during the meeting to the government's home affairs minister, Piet Hein Donner.

Despite its title, the national synod had no authority to take binding decisions. Instead, its members discussed with each other what their religious beliefs have in common. An often-heard phrase was, “There is more that binds us than divides us.” The country's ecumenical broadcaster, IKON, reported that the establishment of a single Protestant church was not one of the assembly's aims. Barend Kamphuis, one of the organisers, said that a national synod would not be an annual event, though there will “certainly” be two more such synods before 2018, the 400th anniversary year of the Synod of Dordt. It is hoped that there will be a synod in 2018, and that it will be able to take binding decisions.

Gerrit de Fijter, a former president of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, and the person credited with the idea of holding the modern-day national synod, said that the next step was to involve denominations that had refused to attend the December meeting. The absentees included both liberal and conservative Protestant denominations, notable of which was the Remonstrants Brotherhood. The 17th-century synod had condemned the Remonstrants as heretics and banished them from the Reformed churches.

The Protestant Church in the Netherlands was founded in 2004 as a result of the merger of the country's two largest Reformed denominations and the smaller Lutheran church. ➤

## Oliebollen - a Dutch New Year tradition

- 3 Tbsp yeast
- 2 cups warm water (divided)
- ½ cup white sugar
- 2 tsp salt
- 2 tsp cinnamon
- 2 cups milk
- 5 cups flour

\*raisins or diced apples (optional)

- 4) Drop scoops of dough in hot oil in a deep-fryer or heavy, deep pan by tablespoonfuls, until brown on both sides (about 8 minutes).



- 5) Take out with a slotted spoon to help drain the oil. Oliebollen should be soft and not greasy. If not, your oil is not hot enough. Drain on paper towels.

- 6) Roll in icing sugar. Eat hot, and enjoy!

**Tip:** For those of us who are intimidated by all the ingredients, you can buy the oliebollen mix at your local Dutch Store.

### Instructions

- 1) In a large bowl, mix yeast, 1 cup warm water, and sugar; stir until dissolved.
- 2) Add salt, cinnamon, remaining cup of warm water, milk and flour as well as raisins or apples if you choose.
- 3) Cover bowl, and let rise for 1 hour in warm spot until the dough doubles.



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## News

## Shoe Tree inspires service

Angela Reitsma Bick

Hamilton, ON – It started simply enough. Sue van der Heiden read her grade two class a book. *The Shoe Tree*, by local writer Della van-Dokkumburg, catches the immigrant experience in rhyme: "My grandma's parents had a dream a long, long time ago / To leave their home and board a ship with seven kids in tow." The Dutch family in the story creates a new Canadian tradition of hanging old shoes on a young maple tree. The book also offers teacher resources, including the suggestion to create a classroom shoe tree and solicit footwear for the needy.

Just after finishing the book, van der Heiden heard about a local radio station that was collecting shoes for



Haiti. "Bingo!" she remembers thinking. "I can use that."

The students eagerly made posters, sent home notes and created their own shoe tree at school. Van der Heiden made sure to put their service efforts in context: she explained Haiti's earthquake, its political unrest, its climate and the need for shoes.

She hopes that her students learn that "we are very blessed here in Canada. We have a lot more than we need, and we have to share with those in need. Not just at this time of year, but ongoing." The grade two class, with the help of fellow students at Calvin Christian School, collected 311 pairs of shoes to send to Haiti.

## Odds and Trends

### Buy Nothing Day at the University of Northern BC



Virginia & Neil Lettinga

"Black Friday," the Friday after American Thanksgiving, is a day that many retailers count on swinging out of red ink and into black. In 1992, the excessive advertising and shopping mania inspired a couple of Vancouverites to launch a symbolic protest on this peak sales day; "Buy Nothing Day" is a protest against over-consumption and against creating identity out of what we buy.

For six years now, the UNBC chaplaincy has supported Buy Nothing Day on campus. We hand out a small flier that encourages students to think of the spiritual dimension of Buy Nothing Day.

- a moment of liberation from the advertising pressures that want to define us by our purchases.
- a moment of recognition – our identities come from God, not from what we buy.
- a moment of solidarity with the many who make our things, far away from our culture of abundance
- a moment to acknowledge that we are responsible for our earth, and our purchasing choices can damage it.

Over the years, Buy Nothing Day has engendered many lively conversations. Christian students are among those most troubled by the idea.

"Are you saying that shopping is wrong?" asks Peter, looking at the flier.

"No, I think shopping is necessary in our current culture," Virginia answers, "but do you think shopping is right? Can we shop too much? Buy too thoughtlessly?"

"Well . . . I don't think I want to think about it too much or I might feel guilty," laughs Peter.

"Buy Nothing Day is a bad idea – if everybody quit buying, that would hurt the economy, and the economy's already bad enough," says Sarah. "Christians don't want to hurt the economy."

"Putting a total brake on buying and selling would rock the economic boat," Virginia agrees, "but we're not advocating that – nor

do we think there's any risk of that. This is more like a fast. Stepping away from all buying for just one day. Can you do it? Can you plan ahead and pack a lunch instead of buying it? Can you bring a thermos of coffee and skip Timmy's?"

"What about freedom in Christ? Can't I buy what I need?"

"Certainly you're free in Christ, but do you think the Apostle Paul was talking about shopping freedom? What do you think it is Jesus is freeing us from?"

Andrea joins the conversation. "Two years ago I thought it would be easy to do Buy Nothing Day – I really didn't think I bought much of anything on campus. But on that day somehow it didn't work out like that. I needed something from the bookstore and I wanted to buy coffee with a friend. It was weird how easy and automatic my buying was. I just hadn't noticed. So last year I thought I'd try it again . . . but I didn't succeed any better. So this year, I'm not going to try. I know we buy too much stuff, and I know that my choices are exploiting people in Third World countries . . . but I guess I don't think I've got the backbone to change." She pauses. "Even for a day. That's really pretty bad, isn't it?"

"You might try tackling it with prayer," Virginia suggests. "After all, it is just one day – just as you said."

Andrea looks thoughtful. "Well, maybe I should. Isn't it funny how hard it can be to do something you think is right?"

Buy Nothing Day opens up a whole host of questions for Christians: How is God calling us to live? Could God be calling us to something difficult or costly? What should we do when we fail to live as we'd like to? We feel some ambivalence about the posturing that has come to be part of International Buy Nothing Day, but we feel very positive about the discussions it raises!



Neil & Virginia Lettinga are Chaplains serving at the University of Northern British Columbia.

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